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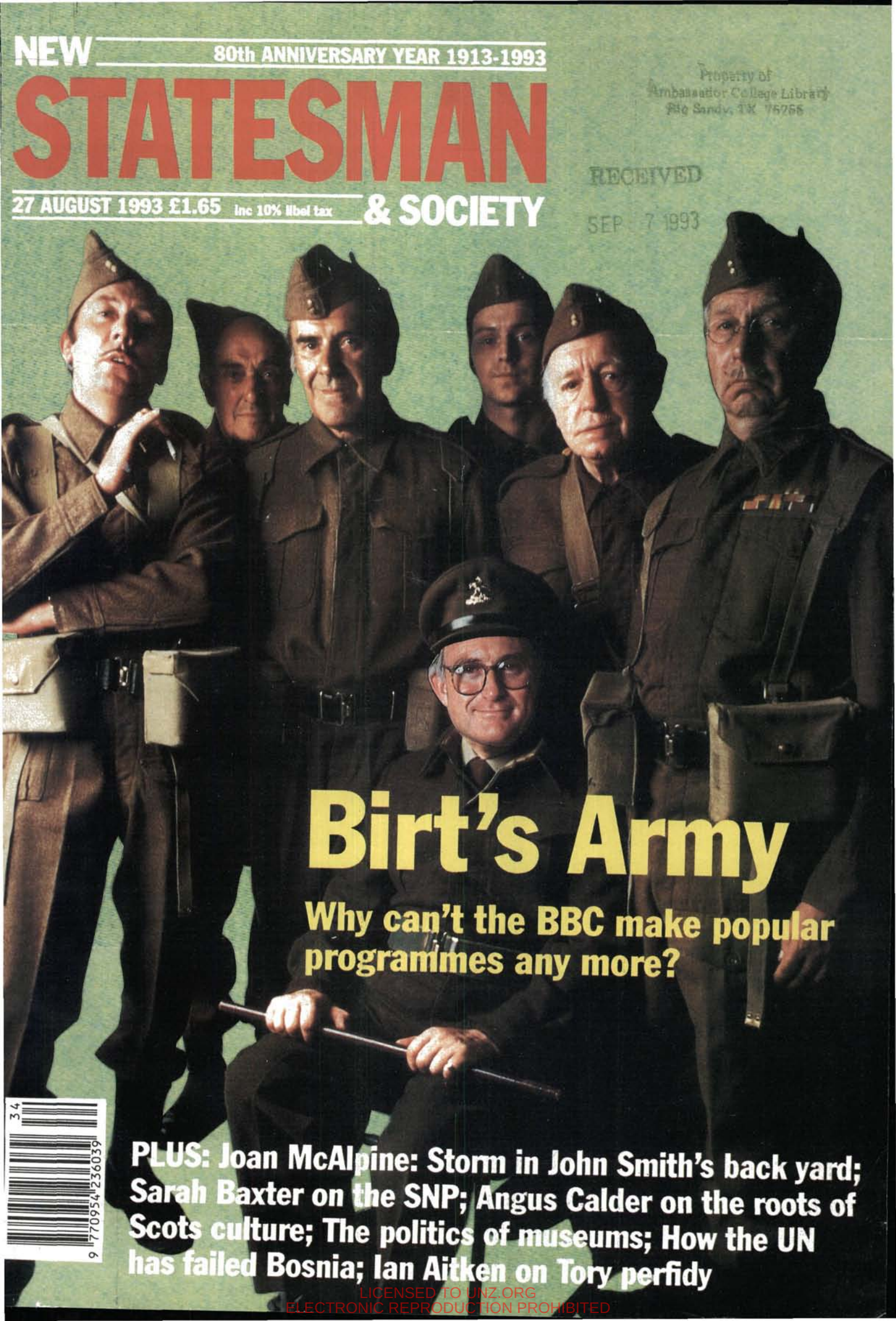

Birt's Army

Why can't the BBC make popular programmes any more?

PLUS: Joan McAlpine: Storm in John Smith's back yard; Sarah Baxter on the SNP; Angus Calder on the roots of Scots culture; The politics of museums; How the UN has failed Bosnia; Ian Aitken on Tory perfidy

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Passing the cricket test

Thank you to all those who have sent in donations and messages of support to the Defence Fund this week. We have already raised around half the amount we need to see off the £250,000 that the Prime Minister's libel action has cost us, but we still need the rest. Don't forget the John Major Memorial Test on Saturday 18 September: the PM's own constituency plays host to the *NSS* vs Huntingdon Labour Party cricket match. The first ball is bowled at 2pm at the St Peter's Road Cricket Ground, Huntingdon. Come along and watch, and join the post-match dinner at the Commemoration Hall, Huntingdon, on the same evening: tickets for the dinner are £5 and £8, and are available from Lesley Shipgood on 0480 458762.

October sees a Defence Fund night of traditional entertainment at the intimate Brick Lane Music Hall, housed in the old Truman's brewery stables in London. Join joint masters of ceremonies Vincent Hayes and, yes, Steve Platt, on Friday 15 October for an evening of song, music, comedy and cabaret. Tickets, which include a three-course meal, are only £20. Book early to ensure your place at the event recommended by Ian Aitken as "the authentic piss-up in a brewery". For tickets, donations and information, call Nicola Baird or Nyta Mann on 071 739 3211. Or use the coupon below, and why not buy one of our T-shirts while you're at it?

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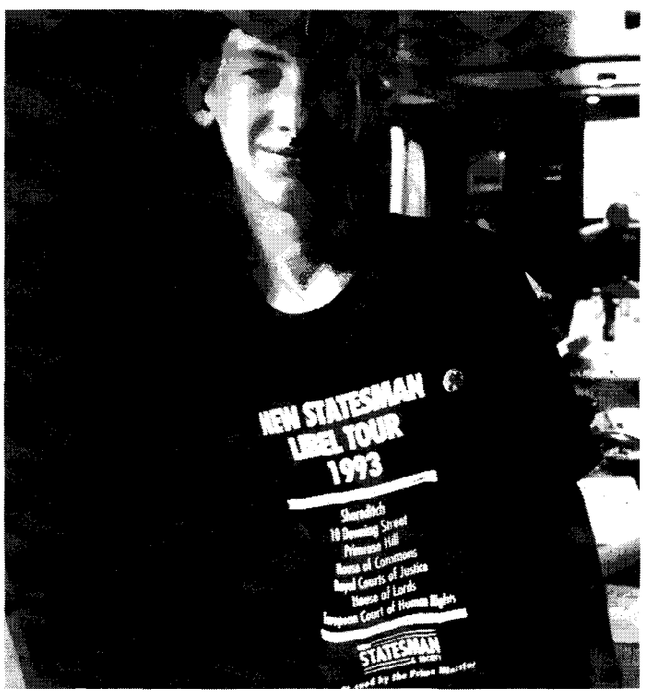

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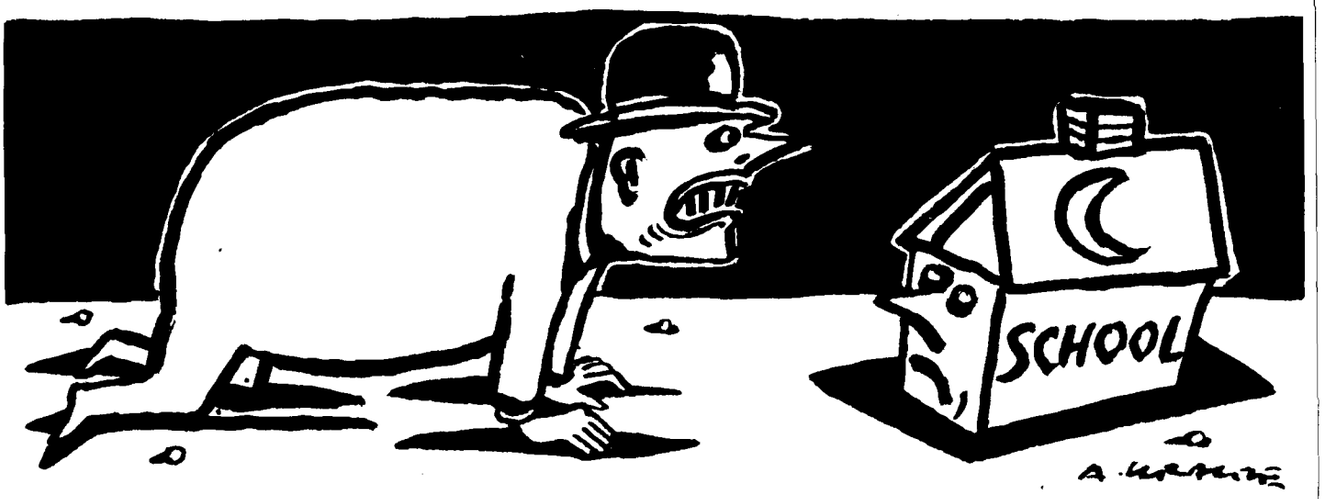

Andrzej Krauze

Religion and education

Once again, the question of state funding for denominational schools has hit the headlines. The immediate reason this time is the government's announcement last week that it would not grant voluntary-aided status to a private Muslim school in Brent, north London.

Baroness Blatch, the Minister of State for Education, said that the Islamia primary school, founded ten years ago by Yusuf Islam, formerly the pop singer Cat Stevens, did not qualify for state funding because there were already more than enough state primary school places in Brent. Muslims responded by denouncing the government for pursuing a blatantly discriminatory policy. If state funding is all right for 2,100 Roman Catholic, 2,000 Anglican, 21 Jewish and four Methodist schools, they argue, why shouldn't Muslim schools get it too?

As just about every quality newspaper has remarked in a leader, the Muslims seem to have a strong case. The government's excuse for refusing state funding is feeble even by its own execrable standards: the Islamia school is heavily over-subscribed, with a 1,000-name waiting list even though it charges more than £1,000 a year fees, and a majority of its 180 pupils live outside Brent. It is, by all accounts, including that of John Patten, the Education Secretary, who visited it earlier in the year, professionally run and regularly inspected, following the National Curriculum to the letter.

More important than the specific case of the Islamia school, the way that Muslim schools are treated differently from those of other denominations *is* patently unfair. According to the most reliable estimates, there are in the United Kingdom today 1.8 million adult members of the established Anglican church, 1.9 million Roman Catholics, 1.2 million Presbyterians, 400,000 Methodists and 900,000 members of other Protestant denominations. Between 1975 and 1990, total membership of Christian churches declined by 15 per cent. The only Christian churches that have grown are evangelical and charismatic ones.

During the same period, Islam became a firmly rooted part of British life, as did other religions rare here until the wave of immigration from the Indian sub-continent in the 1960s and 1970s. There are now more than one million adult Muslims in the United Kingdom, 300,000 Hindus and 300,000 Sikhs. It is not inconceivable that, within 25 years, Muslims will outnumber Anglicans in the UK.

But if there is a clear case for treating Muslim schools no differently from Anglican, Roman Catholic, Jewish or Methodist schools, that does not necessarily mean that state funding should be extended. It would be just as fair to withdraw it from existing denominational schools and to make state education wholly secular—and there are sound arguments for doing just that.

The most important is based on the simple liberal principle that religious beliefs are essentially private, personal matters. The state should ensure that people are not persecuted for their religious beliefs (or indeed for the lack of them) and should intervene to stop religious practices that break the law. But that should be the end of its involvement. Just as it should do nothing to suppress religious belief, it should do nothing to encourage it. Yet, by funding denominational schools, that is precisely what the state is doing.

It is doing it, moreover, in a way that flies in the face of the assumption, universally applied to other spheres of life, that children do not have the experience to make responsible decisions, even about personal matters. Sex is barred until the age of 16, voting until 18—but denominational schools operate on the basis that there is nothing wrong with a person's choice of religion being heavily influenced, if not determined by, teachers before he or she has reached the age of ten.

Broadening the scope of denominational education would also increase racial segregation in society as a whole, which in turn would exacerbate racial tensions. As the Commission for Racial Equality used to put it (it has subsequently changed its line): "Separate schools are in conflict with the pluralist principles of 'education for all', as not providing pupils with a common education experience, as absolving schools from the need to adapt to a multi-cultural society and as leading to community polarisation and isolation along racial lines."

Unfortunately, such opinions are rarely voiced these days in British politics. Politicians of all parties realise that, even though religious observance in Britain has declined inexorably in the past century, there are votes to be had in religion.

For the Conservatives, with little support among ethnic minority Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs, defence of the status quo against calls for the extension of the denominational schools system is a convenient means of playing the race card to white voters, of a piece with being "tough" on "bogus asylum-seekers". For Labour, which once argued for the abolition of denominational schools (against the wishes of members in its north-western and Scottish Catholic heartlands), promising to extend the system appears attractively fair to liberal opinion and goes down very well in key marginal seats in the Midlands and Yorkshire.

Ultimately, however, the problem is not just one of political opportunism. The whole question of state funding for denominational schools arises, in the end, because of the privileges granted Anglicanism as the official religion of the British state. As with so much that is wrong with British life, the only true solution will come when a government dares to give our creaking constitution a radical overhaul.

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Right, left or wrong?

Whoever started the rumour that Bryan Gould was thinking of challenging Margaret Beckett for the Labour deputy leadership—and Gould denies it was him—is a remarkable publicist. In August, in the absence of anything else to write about, this story spread like wildfire in the press. Gould has had acres of print devoted to his views, without having to do anything more than encourage a little mild speculation about his intentions. Even if he does decide to take on Beckett, nothing will happen until next spring.

Gould cannot be faulted for taking advantage of the opportunites offered to proclaim his message. After all, he resigned from the shadow cabinet in order to be free to speak out. So it was no surprise to hear him on the *Today* programme and to read him in the *Daily Mail* this week voicing his well-known criticisms of Labour's lack of direction.

Almost everything Gould says touches a raw nerve in the party. Who could disagree, as he wrote in the *Mail*, that "Labour seems to be infected by the same illness [as the Tories]—a difficulty in making up its mind, and a paralysing caution about doing or saying anything that might offend anybody"? Surely he is also right to argue that, post-Thatcher, "the public is now actively interested in real alternatives to the Tories rather than in Tory lookalikes". Removing all the negatives until there is nothing left of Labour's policies is indeed a strategy of despair. And it is truly dispiriting, as Gould says, for Labour "to ape the failings of a discredited and directionless government".

So why is it that Gould remains an isolated politician, more marginalised, in many ways, than ever? Partly, it is because he is more cerebral than populist. He has always been something of a loner at Westminster and lacks John Prescott's crowd-pulling appeal with Labour activists. But there is no evidence whatsoever that party members regret spurning him in last year's leadership and deputy leadership contests. Could it be because they are mistrustful of his policies?

For a start, Gould is a diehard Eurosceptic. Had he been leader, Labour would have voted against the Maastricht treaty—and suffered a great split in the process. Having painfully come to accept that Britain's future is in Europe, the party is no mood to retreat into its Little Englander shell. Tactically, it may have been tempting to vote against Maastricht, rather than to abstain, because of the absence of the social chapter. But it would have been quite wrong for Labour to have been led by a politician who was downright hostile to closer European union.

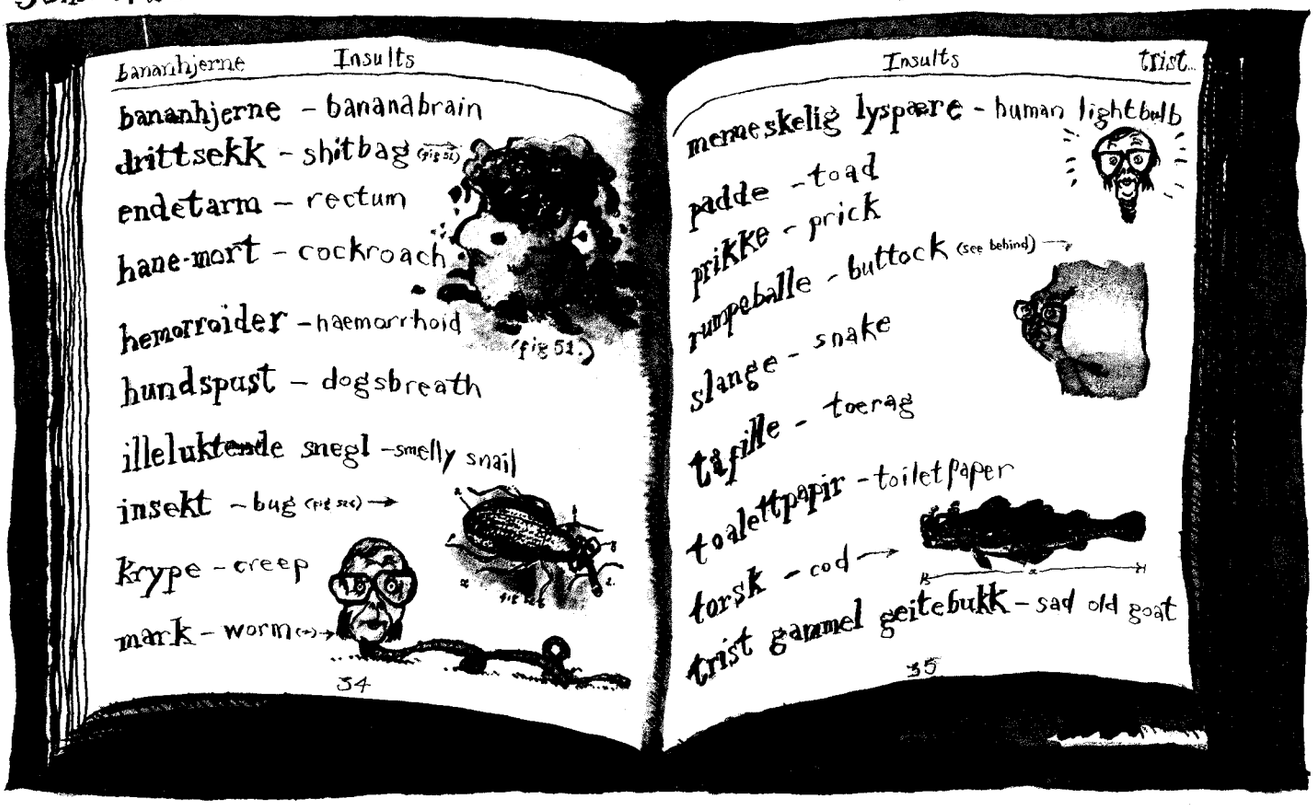
Since last year's contests, sterling has been devalued and the European exchange-rate mechanism has very nearly imploded. Gould has won new friends, including the GMB's John Edmonds, for calling for devaluation when Gordon Brown would not hear of it, and for advocating measures to restore full employment. The monetarist provisions of the Maastricht treaty have become discredited, confusing Labour Party supporters in the process. But it is possible, indeed desirable, to argue that Labour should adopt a bolder economic strategy without abandoning the goal of a federal Europe. Gould has tried to muddy the waters here.

In other respects, Gould is almost as conservative as Margaret Beckett. He is against closer cooperation with the Liberal Democrats, whom he regards as almost as great a threat to Labour as the Tories in the south. He is sceptical about proportional representation, having voted on the Plant committee for the supplementary vote in the expectation that the scheme has too many flaws to get off the ground. And he opposes a straightforward system of one member-one vote for the election of party leader and selection of party candidates.

Gould's critique of the Labour Party is often sharp and accurate, but his own policy prescriptions are not the answer. For all his faults, John Smith remains much the better Labour leader.

FELIX BENNETT

An illustrated Norwegian-English phrasebook which Environment Secretary John Gummer is using at the UN negotiating conference in Geneva.



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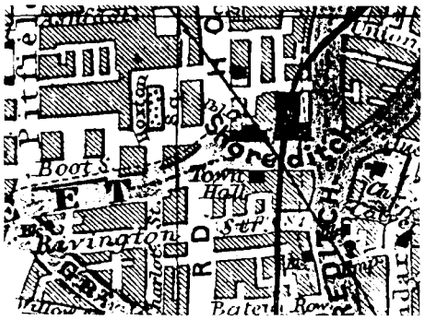

The two ambassadorial Iraqi defectors who arrived here this week can be forgiven for perhaps wondering whether they made the right decision, following the magnificent display of media ratpackery at their "unveiling" press conference this week. First, the heaving scrum of photographers knocked over the press conference table—narrowly missing the new refugees—as soon as the two dazed-looking men appeared. Then half the 400-odd reporters present turned upon the other half and refused, amid catcalls and near-fisticuffs, to allow the press conference to proceed until the taller representatives of the fourth estate were forced to "sit down and get the fuck out of the way". The final degeneration into farce occurred when the two envoys began answering questions from the press in Arabic with the aid of a translator, thus prompting bitter complaints and a rapid switch to English. Welcome to Britain.

According to a report in the left-green German daily *Die Tageszeitung*, the reason for John Major's and Douglas Hurd's "appeasement" policy towards Serbia is that substantial donations to Tory Party funds have come from drug-trafficking deals effected through Serbia and the Serb-occupied province of Kosovo. The drugs money eventually finding its way into Tory party coffers—we're talking millions, maybe even squillions, here—is supposed to have been laundered via the same British banks with branches in Cyprus at which the Milosevic regime has deposited its overseas funds. The documentation proving this delightful story is being used to deter Britain from gunning for Serbia. *Die Tageszeitung* also says that the *Guardian* is bursting to blow the gaffe on the scandal, but is having a little trouble passing it by the libel lawyers (we know the feeling). "Yes, we've seen the story, and it's a load of nonsense!" is the retort of the *Guardian*'s foreign desk. Shoreditch loves nothing better than a good old conspiracy theory, and so it is with deep reluctance that we have to admit this one sounds like the far-too-good-to-be-true sort. Of course, if it turns out to be true after all, remember you read it here first.

As everyone gears up for the party conference season, the editorial committee of Labour Briefing, the unreconstructed barmy-left monthly, has been spending much time in careful consideration of who should next receive the magazine's prized Class Traitor of the Month award, timed to coincide with the Labour Party conference. They're a democratic bunch down at Briefing, but in the end the final choice was unanimously agreed: John Smith. The exact charges to be laid against the Labour leader, however, are as yet unclear. "There are so many, we're having trouble weeding out suitable specimen acts of betrayal," was all they would tell Shoreditch. "But we'll manage."

The curse of Lonrho has struck again. A part of Tiny Rowland's corporation, which nearly wrecked the *Observer*, has closed down the independent Parkway cinema in Camden Town, where *NSS* was due to hold a fund-rasing premiere of Ken Loach's *Raining Stones* next month. After a long court contest with Sunley Tariff, Lonrho's development arm, the art-deco palace's managing director, Peter Walker, has lost a battle against repossession.

The developers have already begun to remove the fittings, but the campaign to save the Parkway—supported by the likes of Michael Palin, Richard Attenborough and Judi Dench—is still fighting. Next Tuesday (31 August), it will be holding a public meeting in the cinema at 7.30pm: possibly the last chance to see the interior. Prevented by Camden Council from demolishing the Parkway, Sunley Tariff may now lease it to another cinema operator: "It's just vindictive that they want Peter Walker out," comments Gerry Harrison for Friends of Parkway. London's indie cinema scene has already lost the wacky Scala at King's Cross in recent months, while the Electric in Notting Hill runs through more retirements and comebacks than Marlene Dietrich.

A literally poetic protest takes place outside the Royal National Theatre in London next month; an international group of poets—including Roger McGough, John Agard, Grace Nichols, Brian Patten and Adrian Mitchell—is planning to demonstrate against the withdrawal by the Malaysian authorities of fellow-poet Cecil Rajendra's passport. Rajendra is due to give a series of readings in Britain next month. The explanation for the curtailment of his right to travel has been given as Rajendra's "anti-logging activities". What activities, exactly, do they mean? The writing of an anti-logging poem called "Chainsaw Massacre". The move against one of south-east Asia's most renowned poets follows the Malaysian government's latest offensive against those voicing concern at the environmental damage done to the country's rainforest by logging companies. Join the Emergency Poets in Concert at the Stone Circle, outside the Royal National Theatre, on the Embankment, London SE1, on Wednesday 8 September between 6 and 7pm, where the assembled poets will be reading their own, and Rajendra's, work in protest and solidarity.

FOURTH ESTATE

A regular monitor of the tabloid press

21 August: The *Daily Mail* takes Treasury Secretary Michael Portillo to task for having told his troublesome right-wing friends to stop clamouring for more spending cuts. "Mr Portillo seems to believe, as this paper does, that public spending should be cut. But he declines publicly to argue for it or enact it. What a shame ministers so eagerly portray themselves as reverse Houdinis, starting as politicians free to argue their case in a democracy but, in an instant of magic, bound and gagged."

The *Sun*, too, feels terribly let down. "Michael Portillo is supposed to be a dry-as-dust Thatcherite who cringes at the thought of higher taxes. What's happened to him?" it demands to know. "He warned yesterday that he planned 'extremely tough' cuts in the bloated levels of government spending. But it's obvious they're not going to be nearly tough enough." There is only one solution: "If Mr Portillo wants his Thatcherite credentials to be taken seriously, he must cut and cut and cut again."

22 August: The *Sunday Express* plays host to some second-hand Tory wrangling, this time from one of their own. "Thorbjoern Bernsten, Norway's environment minister, was wrong to call John Selwyn Gummer a 'shitbag', even if he did so in a language that Mr Gummer could not understand," writes Alistair McAlpine, before going on to clarify his position. "I say this not because I believe that Mr Gummer is not a 'shitbag'. Anyone who has listened to his lengthy lectures on his pet subjects would agree with Mr Bernsten that he is. Rather because it weakened the good case that Mr Bernsten was making."

23 August: A happy day at the *Daily Express*, as Home Secretary Michael Howard makes up for Portillo's neo-liberal shortcomings with his proposals to make prisons an even sharper shock. "We must drop the squeamish liberal concern for prisoners, which mirrors the similarly misplaced concern for the perpetrators of crime rather than its victims." And never mind about the prison inmates not liking it; it's the only language they understand: "Their good behaviour in jail will not be bought by endless television or billiards."

The *Sun* is also much reassured by the smack of firm barbarism: "At last we have a Home Secretary who knows whose side he's on: *Ours*."

Ditto from the *Daily Star*: "Colour TVs in every suite—sorry, cell. Three decent meals a day, all the recreation and 'counselling' anyone could wish for. Plus trips down the pub and weekends at home. If that's prison life, who needs holiday camps?"

25 August: Now that a new social services supremo, Jeffrey Greenwood, has been appointed, it's the turn of social workers to be "reformed", although the *Sun* holds out little hope: "You're wasting your time, Jeffrey. Social workers are arrogant and obsessed with 'racism'. They're not worth a toss."

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Kirsty Milne takes the high road in search of the Scottish Gibbon

Edinburgh, that queenly city, looks a bit tawdry during the festival, like an elegant woman who has misjudged her make-up. It takes stamina to fight your way down Princes Street, dodging shambling Swedes, drifting Japanese, and ranks of Italian youth who insist on walking three or four abreast. I pass over the students dressed as vampires and the Victorian clowns from the fringe.

I know the festival means art, and youth, and foreign currency; but it feels more like the Feast of Fools. Edinburgh residents are surprisingly tolerant, and will even tell you that they enjoy the city's annual lurch into overdrive. My own reserves of patience dried up when a troop of *sans-culottes* from *A Tale of Two Cities* marched across my path, singing French Revolutionary songs.

On the subject of street decor, I'd like to know who ordered thistles to be planted in the flowerbeds of Princes Street Gardens. These are not ordinary thistles but enormous etiolated brutes, unhealthily pale, with a tendency to collapse on top of the well-kept roses. I don't imagine the symbolism was intended, but it's a poor kind of nationalism that assumes people need thistles to know they are in Scotland.

But you can't blame the Scots for wanting to wield their hereditary thorns. The government's indifference to sensitivities north of the border never ceases to impress. Barely a month goes past without some glancing wound to national pride. Last week the *Scotsman* discovered that the Secretary of State, Ian Lang, is planning to sell the old Royal High School on Calton Hill. The building was to have been the home of a Scottish assembly—until the 1979 referendum put paid to the idea. It is as if a friend sold your mother's wedding dress, which you were thinking of wearing yourself.

This autumn's *cause célèbre* will be the proposed reform of local government, which would carve up the huge Labour-dominated regions like Strathclyde into smaller, single-tier councils. Lang has been accused of gerrymandering, and even moderate voices are urging him to think again. Local authorities and the Scottish TUC have said they will boycott the proposals. Observe that no independent local government commission, of the kind now ploughing through the English towns and counties, is being offered *here*. Asking people what they want seems to be OK in Humberside, but not in the Highlands.

One of this year's festival highlights is a stage adaptation of Lewis Grassic Gibbon's trilogy, A Scots Quair (see Angus Calder, page 35). It's one of those books that you resist, grumpily, for years—because it's too long, or you don't like the look of the cover, or because too many people have told you to read it. I was scared of all the dialect words (you acclimatise fairly quickly). But there came an evening when a friend spoke so eloquently in praise of *A Scots Quair* that it was no longer possible not to buy a copy.

Gibbon was an extraordinary writer. He died ridiculously young—in 1935, aged 33, of a perforated gastric ulcer that would not kill him now. His parents were crofters, farming on the north-east coast, in an area of Grampian called the Mearns. Their youngest son, always rebellious, left the land to become a journalist (he was fired from *Scottish Farmer* for fiddling his expenses), and later a soldier, serving in Egypt and Persia just after the first world war. He married Rebecca Middleton, whose family lived in the farm over the hill, and the couple moved to Welwyn Garden City, where Gibbon began to write full-time. ("What's a writer like you doing in Welwyn Garden City?" asked Compton Mackenzie, confused.)

Like her creator, the heroine of *A Scots Quair* comes from a crofting community. In the first book, *Sunset Song*, Chris Guthrie marries a young farmer who is killed in the first world war. In *Cloud Howe*, she moves to the town with her second husband, a minister. The final part, *Grey Granite*, sees Chris driven by hardship to live in the city, where her son Ewan becomes an industrial agitator and a communist.

Sunset Song can be read as a lament for a vanishing way of life. But it has acquired a reputation for sentimentality that is wholly unjustified. Chris's mother commits suicide when she cannot, after repeated pregnancies, face having any more children. Chris's father, left widowed, wants his daughter to have sex with him (this in the days before incest and child abuse became every novel's favourite theme). Public life in *Sunset Song* is equally brutal. As the war gets under way, Chris's favourite neighbour is set upon and stoned by villagers for refusing to enlist.

Gibbon combined a mystical passion for the land with great scepticism about those who farmed it. *Sunset Song* is full of petty prejudices, of scandalised villagers and cruel gossip. His portrayal of the Mearns upset his parents: it upset his mother particularly, who claimed he had made them "the speak of the place". But Gibbon used the voice of the community to great literary advantage. He turned it into a comic narrative voice, a local stream of consciousness—sometimes shrewd, sometimes silly, endlessly intrigued by its neighbours—that anchors the politics and lyricism of the trilogy to everyday life. The more I read the novels, the more I am impressed by Gibbon's technique, and think he should be up there with Lawrence and the other modernists.

We went looking for Gibbon country last weekend, taking the little road that runs from Banchory, west of Aberdeen, over the Grampian hills and into the Mearns. (You can tell where the road is from the trail of dead and mangled rabbits.) At this time of year, the heather really is purple, not brown as it so often is, and forbiddingly dark. We came down into fields where they were burning the stubble in rows of orange flames.

The area is famous for its red-clay soil, visible even in the tractor tracks on the roads. Gibbon was brought up in Arbuthnott, the model for Kinraddie in *Sunset Song* (his real name was James Leslie Mitchell, but he took his mother's name for fiction-writing). The village must have forgiven him by now, as there is a small Grassic Gibbon centre by the side of the road, offering scones and exhibitions. From Arbuthnott you can look down to the North Sea, like a coat of shimmering fish scales in the sun.

We spent the night on the coast at Stonehaven, the main town of the Mearns, where Chris goes after her father's funeral to tell the family lawyer that she will be running the farm on her own—a decision that causes outrage in Kinraddie. She doesn't like Stonehaven: "which thought itself real genteel, and a fine seafront it had that the English came to in summer—daft, as usual, folk said, hadn't they a sea in England?" Even the Stonehaven cats, she thinks, are "genteel and toff-like".

In Stonehaven, Chris bumps into her future husband, Ewan Tavendale, and they walk along the coast to Dunnottar castle. I have seen a lot of castles, and this one rates highly. It's in a stunning position, on a rock looking out to sea, with gulls crying and sheep tearing the grass to lawnmower neatness.

Dunnottar has iconic status in Scottish history. It was stormed by William Wallace, who burned a brace of English soldiers in the chapel. In 1651, when the future Charles II was fighting to regain his throne, he sent the crown jewels to Dunnottar for safe-keeping. In 1685, when the Covenanters were being persecuted for choosing their own ministers and trying to keep Scotland a bishop-free zone, 167 prisoners were thrown into the castle's darkest vault and held there for nine weeks. In *Sunset Song*, Chris peers into the dungeon and thinks: "There the Covenanting folk had screamed and died while the gentry dined and danced in their lithe, warm halls."

There is still a ballroom in Dunnottar castle. But the only creature dancing there now is a stoat in the green quadrangle; the only torture is carried out by gulls smashing shells against the rocks. Gibbon, whose philosophy in *A Scots Quair* was that everything changes and nothing endures, would have liked that.

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Thatcherism is no more: it's official

At the risk of seeming disloyal to the newly *Guardian*ised *Observer* (which God forbid), I must say that I have always found the *Sunday Telegraph* one of the week's most entertaining reads. This isn't because it is simply a good newspaper—although it certainly brings in a lot of splendid, if slightly offbeat, stories. Its real attraction is that it bashes the present government harder and more consistently than any of its rivals, albeit from the right.

Some years ago, when the saintly Sir Peregrine Worsthorne was removed from the editorship of the opinion section of the paper—then known affectionately as Worsthorne College because of its port-and-madeira atmosphere—it seemed probable that all this would stop. It was assumed that Conrad Black, the Canadian proprietor of both the *Telegraphs*, had grown weary of making excuses to Mrs Thatcher and had decided to make the paper a little more orthodox in its conservatism.

But we need not have worried. With Mrs Thatcher safely—well, fairly safely—isolated in the House of Lords, the *Sunday Telegraph* seemed, if anything, to intensify its attacks on the government headed by her successor. Many of these attacks appeared to stem from a loyalist Thatcherite position, and to be founded on a belief that John Major had conned the Lady into giving him her support at the time of the leadership contest.

They had considerable justification for this belief. Indeed, we have it on the authority of her one-time hagiographer, Bruce Anderson, that Major began the deception at a very early stage of his ministerial career. In his book on the fall of Thatcher and the rise of Major (*John Major, the Prime Minister*, Fourth Estate—for which Mr Major is known to have been an important source), Anderson describes two occasions when Major deliberately decided not to reveal his real views, lest they hampered his ascent to the premiership.

The first of these was as long ago as August 1987, when Mr and Mrs Major shared a holiday on the Staffordshire canals with their friends Mr and Mrs Robert Atkins. The two MPs discussed whether Major had any chance of becoming Prime Minister. They decided that he had, but only if he kept mum and allowed as many colleagues as possible to think that he agreed with them.

Mr Anderson asserts that this was less cynical than it looks, because Major genuinely did agree with Mrs T about most things, adding "at that stage, too, he shared her views on Europe". But Major decided to keep his views to himself, lest people twigged that he had set his sights on Number Ten.

The second occasion was during Major's brief and inglorious stint as foreign secretary. Tutored by the mandarins, he was converted to the view that Britain's future was inextricably bound up with Europe. "Needless to say," writes Anderson, "he shared none of these thoughts with Margaret Thatcher. Had he done so, she would have been horrified, and might instantly have lost faith in his judgment of foreign affairs, and in her own favourable assessment of his merits."

One has to agree that he was probably right about that. But, since Mr Anderson made these revelations, we have had the opportunity to judge them against Mr Major's lamentable performance as Prime Minister. And the thing that emerges most clearly from this is that the *Sunday Telegraph* is absolutely right to feel betrayed by that nice Mr Major. He really did set out quite deliberately to fool Lady Thatcher into choosing him as her successor. And it was her support that proved crucial in winning him the premiership.

The anger of the Thatcherites is centred on the sheer incompetence of the man in Downing Street

But one can't help feeling that a central factor in the anger of the Thatcherites, almost as important as last year's ERM fiasco and Major's subsequent betrayal of them over Maastricht, is the sheer incompetence of the man they put into Downing Street at Lady Thatcher's urging. They might have been less bitter about the way he conned them if he had turned out to be a better Prime Minister. As it is, his success at the general election last year has long since been swamped by the sheer humiliation of subsequent events.

This, I suspect, is what lies behind the latest development in the *Sunday Telegraph*'s approach to Thatcherism and its aftermath. For true-blue followers of the Iron Lady must have been startled last weekend by the column written by Frank Johnson, one-time dean of studies at Worsthorne College.

In the past, one has visualised Mr Johnson sitting alone among the dust covers in the college's deserted senior common room, passing the port to himself and muttering appropriate mantras. But, last Sunday, he suddenly declared the Old Faith (as he called it, with typical self-mockery) dead. "Thatcherism is over," he wrote in his final paragraph.

Coming from such a normally jolly source, this unexpected lurch into defeatism deserves to be taken seriously—especially from a man who recently advised the present Home Secretary he could be Prime Minister if he resigned from John Major's cabinet. And the explanation is that Mr Johnson has at last acknowledged that the so-called Thatcherites were an essentially incompatible lot, held together by their admiration for the Lady.

What gave rise to these gloomy speculations was a weird correspondence in another of Conrad Black's papers, the *Spectator*, which has since spilled over into the pages of the *Telegraph*. It revealed that Sir Alfred Sherman, one-time Thatcher guru, is backing the Serbs in Bosnia, even though the lady herself is a passionate advocate of using force to block their crude aggression. Various lesser Thatcherite figures have joined the row, one of them even recommending that Sherman should be stripped of his knighthood.

Musing on this row, Mr Johnson concludes that, when the intelligentsia of Thatcherism start falling out, then it is all up with it as a coherent ideology. And he points out that the so-called Thatcherites really consisted of highly disparate elements that were united only in their hostility to Soviet communism abroad and the trade union movement at home. Once these two ogres had been seen off, he argues, the glue holding the edifice together came to bits.

Now, he says, the former allies disagree about who the new enemy should be, both at home and abroad. He sees Lady Thatcher and her surviving acolytes as essentially traditionalists who want to defend old ideas and ways, and especially Britain's national identity. He classifies many of her ex-supporters as free-marketeers like him, with little interest in preserving old values and institutions. With no Iron Lady, the two wings are now going their separate ways.

If Mr Johnson is right about this—and I think he is—then Mr Major may be daft enough to see it as good news. For the one area in which he has kept faith with Thatcherism is his free-marketeering determination to get rid of virtually the entire public sector. Not even Lady Thatcher had the courage—or, more accurately, the foolhardiness—to privatise things like the railways, the higher civil service and the Royal Mail.

Pressing ahead with such things may be the ticket that wins Mr Major the support of people like Sir George Gardiner, the No Turning Back group, and even the *Sunday Telegraph*. But it may also turn out to be the ticket that loses him the support of everyone else.

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Europe blocks UN efforts

The Roman commander Fabius Cunctator delayed direct battle with Hannibal until the Carthaginians had been worn down. Modern European diplomacy has a new twist; it is delaying confrontation with the Serbs—until the Bosnians give up.

At the United Nations, European diplomats have spent much of August doing their best to stall a Non-Aligned draft resolution that simply summed up the principles evoked in the no fewer than 49 resolutions they have supported over the past 18 months. Before, they had passed them and ignored them, but now the Europeans worry that the Non-Aligned draft would blow holes in any settlement that Lord Owen and Thorvald Stoltenberg can force upon Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic. Muhamed Sacirbey, Bosnian ambassador to the UN, explains that: "Owen keeps sending Boutros-Ghali messages every day saying they are on the verge of an agreement. And of course they are not—but they are saying it just to make sure the resolution doesn't get through."

The Europeans have tried, several times, to redraft the Non-Aligned resolution in a way that totally hamstrings it. Gone are the specific references to Serbian aggression and genocide, and condemnation of Croatian land grabs, to be replaced by condemnation of war crimes by "the *Bosnian* Serbs and all others". This begs the question of why the Security Council is maintaining sanctions against Yugoslavia, if there is no external aggression. Similarly, the ceasefire, which for the Non-Aligned is "essential" for peace negotiations, under the pen of the British and French becomes an "important contribution" to the process. In its own unsubtle way, the European draft would legitimise the continuing betrayal of all the previous resolutions in practice.

The Clinton administration is officially on the side of the angels on this resolution, but its own halo flickers dimly and intermittently. The US ambassador to the UN, Madeleine Albright, is very strong on the issue of Bosnia but, despite being a cabinet level official, she is the weakest American ambassador to the UN for a long time.

It is not her fault. Previous incumbents could expect firm and often ruthless support from the White House and the State Department, as the diplomatic mobilisation behind Desert Storm demonstrated. However, the Balkan department of the State Department is beginning to look like the boat deck on the Titanic, as officials queue to hand in their resignations in protest at the weakness of Clinton's policy. This week, yet another went—making three resignations this month, including the desk officers for Bosnia and Croatia. Many of their colleagues share their feelings, and have been vociferous in the enunciation of it by letter and deputation to Secretary of State Warren Christopher.

Their complaint is that the Stoltenberg-Owen peace plan, just like its predecessors, spells out the details of the capitulation of the multicultural Bosnian state. Although it talks of free and unforced negotiations, the Bosnian delegation was taken to the negotiating table with its hands tied behind its back and a pistol to its head. It talks of disarmament, but in effect that means that the Croats and the Serbs take their weapons across the borders while only the Bosnians are actually disarmed.

To persuade the Bosnians that they will not be immediately slaughtered, Stoltenberg talks of 40,000 troops in addition to the 25,000 already there. There is some doubt, however, about where that many soldiers would come from. It would, for example, be difficult for Clinton to persuade Congress to commit significant ground forces to an operation to enforce the premise that people of different religions cannot live together under a unitary government.

Indeed, if there *are* that many troops available, as one resigned State Department official pointed out, it would be easy to roll back the gains of Serbian and Croatian ethnic cleansing. Hence the whole point of the Europeans' policy—to exonerate themselves from the carnage caused by their previous inaction by pretending that nothing else could have been done. The success of UN action would throw that into considerable doubt. Unfortunately for the Bosnians, Clinton is unlikely to interfere seriously with European perfidy unless the horror movies on television seriously impinge on his poll-driven policy-making.

Ian Williams

30 YEARS AGO

"Spartacus goes to Washington"
30 August 1963

The New Statesman comments on the 20,000 strong civil rights rally in Washington on 28 August

Wednesday's mass demonstration of Negroes in Washington is much more than a symbolic event. It marks the transformation of spasmodic (though increasingly organised) protests against the denial of civil rights into a nationwide movement supported by 20 million people. Colour has been the black man's burden in the United States; now it is becoming his strength, for it imposes a degree of unity, of discipline and of passionate adherence which no other progressive cause can command. The status of the Negro has ceased to be a marginal issue in US public; it has become the principal domestic challenge now facing the Administration.

Machismo in Nicaragua

Some compared the operation with the ambush prepared for Augusto Sandino almost 60 years ago. On 21 February 1934, Sandino, a nationalist general who had succeeded in kicking out the US occupation force in a long and bloody guerrilla war, was ambushed and killed by soldiers of the national guard under the command of Anastasio Somoza.

On 19 August 1993, a peace commission headed by two Sandinista members of parliament, Carlos Gallo and Doris Tijerino, travelled to Quilali, a remote mountain village, some 280 kilometres north of Managua. They had been invited by "Jackal", the commander of the rightist "Northern Front", to talk about an amnesty law for rebels passed by the National Assembly two days earlier.

When the delegation, which included four high government officials and the two major commanders and 20 soldiers of the "Special Disarmament Brigades", arrived at the camp, Jackal drew his pistol and declared his visitors hostages. His demands: the immediate removal of the army chief of staff Humberto Ortega, minister of the presidency Antonio Lacayo and military intelligence chief Lenin Cerna. In a document sent to President Violetta Chamorro, he later also demanded the dissolution of the army, the convocation of a Constituent Assembly and the punishment of the assassins—so far unknown—of a number of right-wing politicians.

The government had not yet decided what to do about the affair, when, the next evening, a left-wing commando seized the headquarters of the National Opposition Union (UNO), where the major political leaders were holding an emergency meeting. The

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NEWS FROM ELSEWHERE

"commando for sovereignty and dignity", led by former army major Donald Mendoza, had only one message: free the hostages in Quilali.

Humberto Ortega, the younger brother of former president Daniel Ortega, is the strategist who directed the popular uprising against Anastasio Somoza, the son of the founder of the dynasty and murderer of Sandino. As defence minister during the Sandinista government, he forged a highly politicised army that kept growing as the armed counter-revolution, organised and financed by the US, developed a social base among poor peasants. After the revolution had ended at the polling stations in 1990—economically and morally exhausted—and Chamorro's conservative government took over, the contras were persuaded to abandon their arms.

The Sandinistas retained important shares in power thanks to a strong minority in parliament, a solid base in the trade unions and, crucially, their control of the armed forces. Humberto Ortega, who once threatened he would "not rest until the last bourgeois were hung on a lamp-post", remained as head of the army on condition that it was stripped of all political bias and reduced from more than 80,000 to fewer than 20,000 troops.

Although, from the very beginning, the new government swore it would establish the rule of law, mistrust prevailed among the former enemies. Before handing over the government, the Sandinistas handed out thousands of weapons to their supporters. And the contras surrendered less than half of their arsenal.

Soon the first groups of newly armed rebels—"recontras"—surfaced. And it did not take long before former Sandinista officers who had been sacked during the reduction of the army began to organise a new movement, dubbed "recompas" ("compas", short for "companeros", was the term used to refer to Sandinista soldiers). Although both the Sandinistas and the politicians of the UNO coalition deny any direct links to the rebel groups, there is no doubt that such links exist.

Alfredo Cesar, one of the UNO leaders, was seen meeting Jackal only five days before the hostage-taking. And the demands of the hostage-takers are the same as those that the UNO has been trying to impose on the government for several months. Last month, Jackal visited the US, where he had contacts with Nicaraguan businessmen, radical Cuban exile organisations and members of Congress. On the other side, the recompas strike where the army, out of political considerations, cannot.

Politics in Nicaragua is still macho: he who lacks arguments, draws his machete—conciliatory positions are seen as weakness. During the climax of the hostage crisis, Daniel Ortega called a meeting of the government, those UNO leaders who were not hostages and the Sandinista leadership, at which all parties pledged themselves to engage in dialogue to resolve the political crisis. But before the hostages were freed, Arnoldo Aleman, Managua's far-right mayor, denounced the agreement as treachery. It seems that, for the time being, macho politics will prevail.

Ralf Leonhard

LETTER FROM BIHAC

Bihac is the great enigma of the Bosnian war. Nestled beneath lush green hills, Bihac is the main town of the region of north-western Bosnia known as Cazinska Krajina. The self-styled republic of Serbian Krajina in occupied Croatia borders to the north and west. To the south and east are the strongholds of Bosnian Serb forces.

What makes Bihac distinctive is that it has survived. Declared a UN safe area on 6 May, it has lived up to the name more than any other of the five UN-protected zones. Bihac has not had to bear the kind of siege that the citizens of Sarajevo have suffered. Nor has it witnessed the same level of bestial atrocities that Serb forces have committed in Srebrenica, Ceska, Zepa, Gorazde, Banja Luka and elsewhere in Bosnia. Conditions, of course, are hard: there is practically no electricity, and water runs for only five hours per day. But for the 300,000 inhabitants of Caskinska Krajina, 50,000 of whom live in Bihac, there is now little danger of being hit by a sniper's bullet and starvation does not lie around the corner. Convoys of aid, driven by the UNHCR and the French UN contingent, rumble through the area on a regular basis, and people are already stockpiling wood to burn during the freezing winter months.

What makes Bihac distinctive is that it has survived. There is little danger from sniper's bullets or starvation

There are two key factors involved in the survival of Cazinska Krajina. The first is, the figure of Fikret Abdic, a member of the Bosnian collective presidency from Velika Kladusa and a successful entrepreneur, who built up the Agro-komerc food company. In 1987, Abdic was jailed on the questionable charge of having forged one billion dollars' worth of promissory notes. Emerging from prison in time for the rise of Bosnian nationalism, Abdic became a leader of the Muslim Party of Democratic Action (SDA). Cazinska Krajina became his power base.

Abdic is widely credited as the man who has maintained the circulation of food and money in the area. There was recent speculation that he would openly challenge Alia Izetbegovic, the Sarajevo-based president, for the Bosnian leadership. However, another financial scandal has been thrown at him by, among others, the Austrian government. This time, the allegation is that Abdic has been profiteering from humanitarian aid donations. It is a charge that his friends and supporters in Bihac hotly deny.

The second factor is the fifth Corps of the Bosnian army under the command of Ramiz Drekovic, a handsome, boisterous man from the predominantly Muslim Sandzak region of Serbia. Allied to the local Croatian defence council (HVO), and numbering about 30,000 troops, the fifth Corps has managed to hold back the roughly 60,000 Serbian troops surrounding Cazinska Krajina. Drekovic, who is a former Yugoslav army career officer, prides himself on having organised a proper army and not a rag-tag unit. All his soldiers wear uniforms and jump to attention when he strides past. Their weapons are drawn from Yugoslav army supplies, but are by no means sufficient, though a tank and a few armoured personnel personnel carriers have been seized from the Serbs.

Local pride in the endurance of Bihac has generated a kind of political regionalism. Under great strain, many people will tell you, a system has been put in place that works. For Ejub Topic, president of the Bihac regional assembly, organisation is the buzzword. "As the westernmost area of Bosnia, we look towards Europe," Topic says. "There is a different culture and different mentality here." Although he scoffs at the notion that the Sarajevo government is bent on bringing Islamic radicalism to Bosnia, Topic is nevertheless keen to point out the secularism of the Bihac Muslims. "I used to go and see my uncle in Zepce [a town in eastern Bosnia]," he says, "and he used to get angry with me for not going to the mosque. Here, religion is a completely private affair." Drekovic also makes the same point.

Watching Croatian TV at his headquarters, he sneers at a report about the seizure of an arms cache destined for Bosnian forces, which features a close-up of an Iraqi passport, adding: "This is just Croatian propaganda."

Bihac likes to present itself as shrewd and industrious. But there are those who believe that the area's politicians would not be averse to ethnic division in Bosnia. Abdic is singled out as someone who would happily reach agreement with Serb and Croat nationalists. Again, this view is dismissed. "Abdic has had many political enemies in his life and now they are working against him," says Topic, "but our minimum requirement is that the internationally recognised borders are not changed." Drekovic, meanwhile, is a forceful advocate of a unitary Bosnia. While some say he differs from Abdic on key issues, the commander steers clear of direct criticism.

For all the persistence of Bihac and its citizens, the area remains under the watchful eye of the Serbs. For the time being, calm prevails. On the frontline, Serb snipers train their weapons on the Bosnian-held right bank of the river Una, but the shooting is sporadic. Yet, if the west finally concedes to the division of Bosnia and the collapse of Sarajevo, Bihac will be little more than a Muslim Bantustan. In a rather awkward analogy, Topic says Sarajevo is the head of the snake that Serb forces are trying to kill. Without a country, the Bihac region will die.

Ben Cohen

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When it comes to the environment, Bush was bad, but Clinton, presiding over one of the biggest land-grabs in American history, is worse, says **Alexander Cockburn**

Everything must go

St Mary's Church, in my home town of Youghal in County Cork, Ireland, is a venerable pile dating from Norman times. Standing before the altar, gazing down the length of the nave, you can detect, high above and slightly to the right, a small opening. From this vantage point, many centuries ago, the town's lepers, reaching the opening by a special entry, could peek out at the devotions of the notables mustered below. Hence the ancient name for such an opening, "the leper's squint". Such is the vantage point available to progressive folk in the US in the present era.

Cynics in America, as elsewhere, proclaim that the function of the two-party system is to offer the illusion of choice while maintaining basic continuity in the administration of the system. There's a truth here, but not an absolute one. The two major parties offer different avenues to the same objective. A "conservative" approach to Indians in the 19th century was to exterminate them all, and then loot their resources at leisure. There being some trifling impediment to this programme, "liberals" came forward to suggest that the Indians be removed to desolate reservations of ever-diminishing size, with their resources plundered at a marginally slower tempo. Progressive hopes are mostly vested in these tiny shifts in emphasis, often so fleeting as to be invisible to all but the most expert eye.

The Clinton era promises a simplification of this model, which, for decades, has required that an incoming Democratic administration instal one or two reformers in the upper echelons of executive government. The disadvantage of such rotation was that even such a timid hiccup troubled vested power with the inconvenience of having to overwhelm these lonely reformers—never a protracted process, to be sure.

The voting rights division of the Justice Department is still commanded by a Bush appointee, Steve Rosenbaum, who has naturally delighted in maintaining the policies of the past 12 years, with the apparent sanction of attorney-general Janet Reno. This continuity is not singular. The mighty bureaucracies are almost entirely undisturbed by the onset of new management from Arkansas.

One of whom is Bruce Babbitt, the Marlboro Man of environmental stewardship. On 1 August, the *New York Times Magazine* depicted the interior secretary against a series of wondrous western backdrops, while a mawkish text by Timothy Egan related his plans for America's natural heritage. Connoisseurs of this particular genre of puffery recalled the imperishable photographs of Reagan's interior secretary, James Watt, hunkered by a purling brook in some glen, torso encased in plaid fresh from Western Wear, lower limbs in rigid Levis, and a stetson perched on the crown of his head.

Babbitt threatens to achieve victories over environmentalists undreamt of by the Reagan and Bush administrations, amid reverential treatment from a press corps that hails him as the scion of John Muir. Consider Babbitt's compromise deal for the Everglades . . .

Munich in the cane fields

Glance at an old map of southern Florida, and you will see Lake Okeechobee at the head of what is sometimes called a "river of grass", the Everglades marsh ultimately draining out at the southern tip of mainland Florida.

Today, the Everglades are half the size they were in 1900. On vast tracts of reclaimed farmland south and southeast of Lake Okeechobee grows sugar cane, fertilised by polluting chemicals, cut by some of the most exploited labour on the continent, cushioned by subsidies and protected from foreign competition. In grateful recognition of such blessings, the sugar industry gives more money to candidates for federal office than Ford and General Motors combined. Disbursements in 1990 by the sugar barons ran at twice those of the National Rifle Association.

The natural but slow dispersal of water from Lake Okeechobee through the Everglades is inimical to the orderly production of sugar cane. Canals first irrigate, then hurry water to the Atlantic, thus drying out and hence killing off the great marsh. Such water as is permitted to flow to the marsh is heavy with silt and phosphates from fertiliser, promoting unwelcome plant life, especially cattails.

It's one of those stand-offs where either you have the Everglades, including Everglades National Park, or you have sugar barons, real-estate sub-divisions and, in the not too distant future, no Everglades at all. In 1988, the federal government sued the state of Florida for failing to enforce water quality standards in the Everglades. Three years later, the state agreed to a clean-up, with a scheme from the sugar industry and kindred interested parties. On 13 July of this year, under the supervision of Babbitt (himself supervised by the sugar barons, as described in an article in the Miami-based *Daily Business Review*), a new deal—essentially the one proposed by the barons—was disclosed. The 1991 plan would have cut levels of phosphate pollution by 80 per cent by 1997 and 90 per cent by the year 2002. The new plan has more modest goals altogether, premised on an engineering record of proven failure elsewhere.

The sugar barons will continue to get plenty of water. They will continue to apply phosphate with an unstinting hand, reducing pollution in the Everglades by the simple expedient of denying it water in any form.

Environmental Picture Library

Such polluted water as flows to the marsh will be, theoretically, cleansed in a series of man-made wetlands, 40,000 acres in extent. Building these filtration ponds will account for most of the $465-million cost of the scheme. The taxpayer kicks in the contributions of the state of Florida and of the feds and of the cost of advancing free loans to be (presumptively) repaid by the barons, who will also be writing off their annual $12-million-odd contributions to the scheme, all at further cost to the taxpayer. Growers who don't sign on won't have to abide by the terms of the deal, which may indeed collapse because the barons, like big timber, want it all.

The idea of turning the headwaters of the Everglades into a sewage treatment plant has no encouraging precedent. It has, so far, proved impossible to contrive an artificial wetland. But beyond that, there is a limit to the cleansing capacity of any marsh. In California's Central Valley, the Kesterson wildlife reserve became so laced with agricultural silt and runoff that the state had to fire cannon blanks to deter birds from landing in the toxic bog. Finally, it had to be filled in.

Babbitt hymned his Everglades plan as "the largest, most ambitious ecosystem restoration ever undertaken in this country". Similarly enthusiastic for Babbitt's solution was Alfonso Fanjul, chairman of the sugar company Flo-Sun, whose family—according to the Clean Water Fund—has contributed over $500,000 to Republican and Democratic politicians since 1985. José Fanjul was vice-chairman of the 1992 Bush-Quayle finance committee, which did not inhibit Alfonso from rejoicing on 13 July: "In November 1992, America cast a vote for change. Today, the Clinton administration delivers." It was, he said, "the end of gridlock".

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Clinton's compromise over sugar cane might mean the end of the Everglades in Florida

Such enthusiasm was not apparent from the environmental camp. At the press conference where the plan was disclosed, Joe Browder, a consultant to the Everglades Coalition, said angrily to Babbitt: "This whole plan is bad science. I can't understand why you would agree to this."

"Well, that's my job, Joe, to find compromise," Babbitt replied.

Mumma's fate

Let us return to the seamless continuity of Bush-to-Clinton. Take the case of the Forest Service. Although the agency has its policies set by interior secretary Babbitt, it actually falls in the domain of the Agriculture Department, headed by former Congressman from Mississippi, Mike Espy.

On forest matters, Espy defers to his assistant secretary Jim Lyons, former staff chief of the House Agricultural Committee. The head of the Forest Service is still Dale Robertson, appointed in the Reagan era.

In November of 1989, a number of Forest Service supervisors from the northern Rockies sent an extraordinary communication, later known as the Sunbird Letter, to chief Robertson. They described the Forest Service as "an organisation out of control" and charged that insensate logging of federally managed lands was destroying the service's credibility in the eyes of the public and its own employees.

This was mutiny, and retribution has been exacting. Today, of the 13 Forest Service supervisors who put their name to the Sunbird Letter, only three remain. The other ten have retired or been transferred out of the region.

The most famous of the mutineers was John Mumma, the first biologist in the service to become a regional forester. He administered 13 forests in the northern Rockies, embracing 23 million acres of public assets.

It was not long before Mumma incurred the displeasure of the timber companies and their political representatives for failing to meet his timber quota. Senators Conrad Burns of Montana and Larry Craig of Idaho launched "investigations" of Mumma. In August 1991, Mumma was confronted by his superiors and ordered to a desk job in Washington DC. He refused, and was forced into resignation on 30 August 1991. His fate was regarded as tersely symbolic of the exploitative norms prevailing in the Reagan/Bush era.

One of the first letters to land on the desk of incoming agriculture secretary Espy was from a state appeals court judge in California, William Newsom. Writing in a private capacity, Judge Newsom expressed concerns about the apparent political motivation for Mumma's removal.

Espy's reply to Newsom was both revealing and ominous. "The decision to move Mr Mumma," Espy wrote, "was not based on political motives of the previous administration." Espy added that he would expect his senior employees "to follow the general direction of my administration".

Since the Forest Service senior personnel are unchanged, we can expect the policies to remain unchanged too. The men who ousted Mumma—chief Robertson, associate chief George Leonard and deputy chief James Overbey—all remain in place. In June, the same month Espy wrote to Newsom, two more recalcitrant supervisors were forced out by this grim trio, thus setting the stage for one of the greatest lootings of public assets in the history of the republic, next to which the Clinton plan for the Pacific northwest is chicken feed: the surrender to timber companies of 4.5 million acres of presently roadless and unlogged forest land in Montana and six million more of the same in Idaho.

Bring back Bush

Those who think my paeans to James Watt and to Bush are vulgar hyperbole should reflect on the latest tidings from Washington. After selling out the national forests and the Everglades, the latest scheme of the White House gang is to succeed where Dan Quayle failed and cap the wetlands fight with a surrender to the farm lobby.

A story distributed by Newhouse News Service by Bruce Alpert reports a government proposal to allow "mitigation banking", another version of the pollution credit. Farmers and developers would be permitted to develop wetlands if they helped to create or restore other wetlands in nearby areas.

Think about your local slough, imagine a developer filling it in for tract homes and then imagine the "restoration" work this developer would present as his mitigation. As we have seen, artificial wetlands have never yet been successfully contrived.

Next up on the block is a plan by the EPA to drive a stake through the Delaney clause in the Food, Drug and Cosmetics Act of 1958 that forbids any carcinogenic additives to food. If the Republicans had tried any of this, they would have been beaten into the ground.

INFLUENCES

BERYL BAINBRIDGE
Author

What books and authors have had the greatest influence on your political beliefs?
Thérèse by François Mauriac; *Sons and Lovers* by D H Lawrence; *Dombey and Son* by Charles Dickens; the schoolboy romance *Stalky and Co* by Rudyard Kipling.

Name one film, one book, one play, one poem and one piece of music that you would most like everyone to see, read or hear.
Film: Walt Disney's *Mary Poppins*.
Book: Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*.
Play: *Death of a Salesman* by Arthur Miller.
Poem: "Dover Beach" by Matthew Arnold.
Song: "MacArthur Park" sung by the actor Richard Harris.

In the early stages of your life, which figure stands out as an important influence on you?
My mother and my father; Joseph Stalin; the local butcher; my piano teacher Mrs Formby (she boiled the pig-swill in between my rendering of the "Fairy Wedding Waltz"); and Doctor Cyril Taylor.

What event during your lifetime has had the greatest effect on you political beliefs?
Being able to have constant hot water. In my childhood, people smelt. This led to the erroneous belief that the poor were smelly by nature.

Which political figure, living or dead, do you most admire?
Lord Macaulay, because he wrote like a dream; Woodrow Wyatt, because he speaks his mind and he doesn't care whom he offends.

If you could visit any time in history for 24 hours, which would you choose?
This is a grammatically incorrect question, but I would like to have been at dinner in Streatham the night Henry Thrale died. Dr Johnson was there, and observing the rapid rate at which Mr Thrale was consuming both food and drink, begged him to be more abstemious.

What do you consider to be the greatest threat to the freedom and liberty of the individual?
The welfare state, the Conservative government, and fundamentalism.

On important matters, whose opinion—other than your own—do you trust most?
David Tomlinson, Colin Haycraft, and Marjorie Proops.

Who is the greatest Prime Minister we never had?
Tony Benn, because he would have turned everying upside down.

If you could pass one law, what would it be?
The law I would pass would be one that would forbid the conception of children by uneducated, disadvantaged, apolitical boys and girls.

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"VOTERS were fed up with the recession, with the government, with politics as a whole." It was a throwaway remark in the aftermath of the Christchurch by-election, and barely noticed. But, in recognising the crisis in "politics as a whole", Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd made a candid admission.

Of course, it is a very British crisis. Neither dramatic nor immediately life-threatening. But this does not mean that its effects are less debilitating.

On 16 September, New Statesman & Society will host a conference at the London School of Economics: "British Democracy—Condition Critical?" Some will say we are being sensationalist, inviting arched eyebrows and cynical smiles. We may attract the stiff upper lip reflex: ". . . after all, this isn't Bosnia, is it?" Some may preach "getting the economy right" or "one more heave". Some will deny there is any crisis.

By tradition, our political establishment sees its duty as bravely playing on, rather like the orchestra on the Titanic. During comparatively normal times, this reflex could be a useful defence against extremism, malice or crackpot solutions like the poll tax.

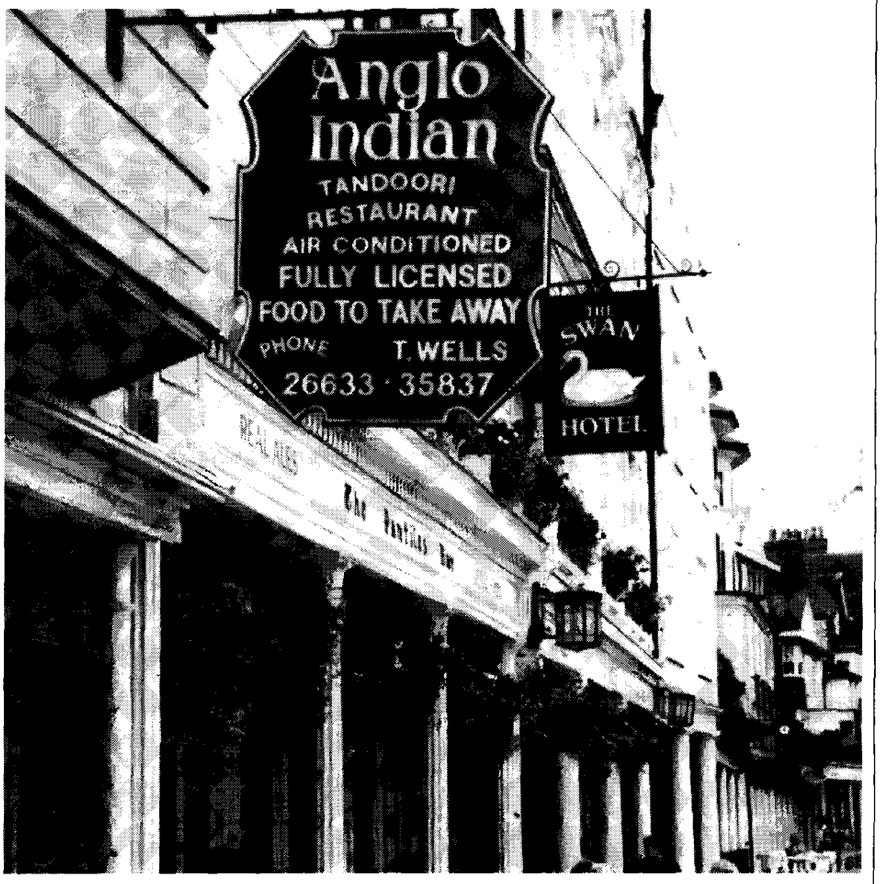
But are these any longer comparatively normal times? Perhaps as many as two million citizens no longer register to vote. Politicians are more unpopular than ever before, yet most are regularly re-elected. Asil Nadir's flight to northern Cyprus highlighted the secrecy shrouding the finances of the party that has been in power for 14 years, and within the principal opposition party some argue without a trace of irony against "one member one vote".

If Westminster withstood the stresses of the turbulent 19th century better than Berlin or Paris, it was because parliament enacted far-reaching, democratic political reforms once in every generation between 1832 and 1918. Is reform needed anew? Is change required once again to restore the relationship between the politicians and the "punters"? What form should that change take and how should it come about?

We will be addressing all these questions and more in a series of pieces in the run-up to the conference. For further details, see the advertisement on page 43.

Gareth Smyth kicks off a series of articles on the state of British democracy with a visit to the town in the heart of Kent where retired colonels traditionally go to die

Not so disgusted of Tunbridge Wells



A sign outside the Jail House pub offers "mellow lunches and wild weekends" but its promise of "the most fun you can have with your clothes on" is rather tongue-in-cheek. Even in self-mockery, Tunbridge Wells reflects its image as the national capital of sobriety, discretion and conformity.

The town is a settled community, perhaps the last place to reflect any tumult in Britain's political life. Contrary to national trends, the poll tax made no discernible difference to voter registration. Even in a seat with a near-20,000 majority, turn-out in the general election was around average at 77 per cent. In local elections it hovers around a healthy 40 per cent.

Sir Patrick Mayhew's reputation as a diligent constituency MP survives his appointment as Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. Although preceded by sniffer dogs and accompanied by armed guards, Sir Patrick still opens fetes and visits schools. "We just get on with it", says his agent, Sarah Rowe. "He's very laid back."

The good folk of Tunbridge Wells sometimes stir. *Daily Mirror* columnist Joe Haines once suggested that Margaret Thatcher was first in serious trouble when 1,000 people marched in Tunbridge Wells against the poll tax. Locals remember lower numbers, and stress that most involved were "ordinary people". Tunbridge Wells is no stronghold of the Militant Tendency.

The up-and-coming, radical political ideology here is the cult of management, with a dose of privatisation and efficiency. Tunbridge Wells borough council has sold its entire housing stock, a total of 5,500 houses and flats, to a council-formed housing association with a minority of councillors on its board, although it continues to allocate empty houses. Council leader David Kirby admits that there is an ambiguity about allocations policy in the longer term, but he stresses that the housing association, free of the restric-

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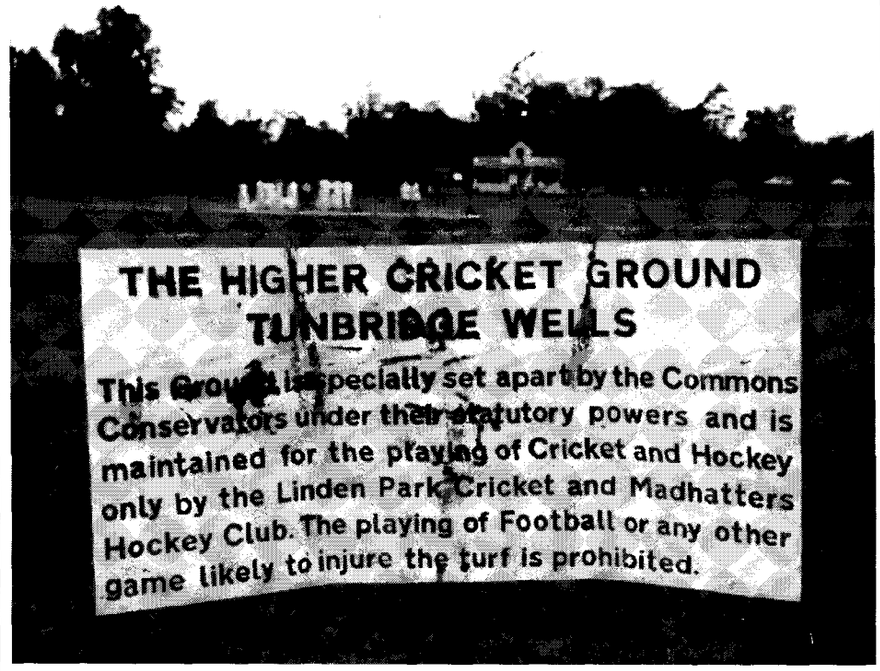
Tunbridge Wells still conserves the old values: The Pantiles (left) and cricket ground (right)



tions on local authorities imposed by the government, is on target for the completion of 500 new homes.

Tenant opposition to the changeover, largely the result of worries over long-term rent levels, has subsided. One mother of three, a resident of the Sherwood Estate, says she has changed her mind. "The service has been very good. It's not so faceless." When she slipped into rent arrears, staff were sympathetic, she says. "There was none of this heavy 'we'll take you to court' attitude you got with the council."

Like many local authorities and public bodies, Tunbridge Wells has adopted "private sector" methods, with an internal market, the empowering of managers and customers replacing citizens. More unusually, the managerial revolution has extended into the heart of the council's political structure.

The council has replaced its committees with "boards". "The difference is a more business-like environment, " says David Kirby, a Clement Freud lookalike. "The committees used to go off on tangents, and could become simply talking shops. The new structure is like the Hanson company."

Once the council's annual meeting agrees broad policy, a central board meets to agree budgets for the 15 other boards, which in turn decide how often they need to meet. Crucially, the boards have considerable delegated powers. The system, Kirby claims, leads to a closer working relationship between councillors and officers, with board chairs and managers cooperating like the chairs and managing directors of public companies. "We want to instil in the managers a feeling that the board belongs to them," he says.

At the same time, Kirby hopes to attract a "new breed" of councillor. "Local government can have a debilitating affect on go-ahead people," he says. "We are trying to create a climate where expertise and flair are valued and seniority isn't everything."

Myrtel Streeton, who retired two years ago after serving as a borough councillor for 26 years, hails from a school of conservatism based more on stability than the free market. "I lurk behind a laurel hedge," she jokes when giving directions on how to find her home, almost inviting you to believe she is the archetypal "disgusted of Tunbridge Wells". But her crisp intelligence and breezy optimism quickly shine.

The town derives its existence from the patronage of its chalybeate (iron bearing) springs by the royal family in the 17th century, and Streeton has a large photograph of the Queen Mother in her vestibule. She is very loyal to the Conservative Party, but is uneasy about the council's new ethos, which she saw develop in her final years as a councillor. "I'm very old-fashioned. I've always believed that if one had abilities, one had a duty to give them. That sounds frightfully passé. The concept of public service has always been very special for me."

Streeton feels that "management" has become "almost an idol" for the council, and regrets the fashion for appointing generic managers to run departments. "I think it's better to teach professionals the necessary administrative skills," she says.

Prominent on planning issues, Streeton sought conservation. A local hotel proprietor suggests that she generally opposed development, welcoming this as a counterweight to those who wanted to send in the bulldozers. She feels that she balanced the market pressures for development with preserving the town's character.

Streeton's handiwork is readily seen. The facade of the closed Tunbridge Wells West railway station has been retained, and the burger restaurant within is one of the more discreet of the genre. The Safeways car park is open to non-customers and so helps ease general parking problems. The Pantiles, the elegant parade of shops near the springs, has been preserved.

Ian Carvel, the local party secretary, says that people support Labour in elections "just to be awkward"

Another critic of council policy is Walter Clary, one of only three Labour borough councillors. An energetic, tall man of 73, he has stood 22 times for public office in Kent, emerging victorious on only four occasions.

Clary has a desire to preserve natural surroundings. He raised 750 frogs this year in a small pond in the back garden of his bungalow (he feeds wheatgerm to his "piranha-type tadpoles"). A former communist who originally came to Kent from Islington for wartime bomb disposal, he is a committed Christian and an active member of the British Legion.

All this makes him out of place in David Kirby's Tunbridge Wells. "They take the mickey out of me, say I'm emotional," he says. "Some people laughed when I put forward a resolution for a rolling tree programme." But the motion went through. "The old tree officer was ever so thrilled."

Labour is not used to success in Tunbridge Wells. In last year's general election, the party polled less than 14 per cent. Ian Carvel, local party secretary, says that people support Labour "just to be awkward". At 24, he has himself already stood unsuccessfully four times for public office.

At county level, Labour is more successful, with 30 seats to the Tories' 40 and the Liberal Democrats' 29 following May's county elections, which saw the Conservatives lose their majority on Kent county council for the first time in more than a century. Kent is now one of the 28 out of 47 counties in England and Wales with no overall control. The responsibility for chairing committee meetings rotates, so committee chairs are no longer quasi-ministerial positions. Council officers regularly meet spokespersons from all three parties.

The Liberal Democrats, who won four of their ten county gains in Tunbridge Wells, are in their element. Alfred Baker, former Lib Dem leader on the borough council, has suddenly found himself at County Hall in Maidstone. "The Tories talk of Labour/Liberal control. It isn't. On almost every issue we and Labour just disagree with the Tories."

He has few differences with Labour, and was a member before joining the SDP. He says the main reason for his leaving was not ideology but Labour's lack of internal democracy: "Nobody ever asked me who I wanted as a candidate for anything."

Despite the generally behind-the-scenes talk of inter-party cooperation, many in Labour's ranks are proud to keep the flag flying. And there are few overt signs of any crisis in Conservative ranks.

Myrtel Streeten says she has no crystal ball to predict the outcome of a by-election should Sir Patrick fall under the proverbial bus, or even perhaps the kind of Conservative who would be picked as candidate.

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Alan Reevell / The Guardian

In the heart of Labour's Scottish powerbase, the Catholic-dominated Monklands council is caught up in allegations of corruption. **Joan McAlpine** reports

Trouble in John Smith's back yard

Ian McNeil, secretary of the Greengairs ward Labour Party, Lanarkshire, has a battle on his hands. The boys in the Orange flute bands laugh when he suggests they exchange their uniforms for the respectable clothing of the modern Labour Party. "Labour's for the Catholics, Ian. A good Orangeman like you is wasting your time." McNeil, himself a former miner, had one recruiting success last year. But when asked why he joined up, the new member replied: "I work for the council and it helps with promotion." Welcome to Monklands East, the political home of Labour leader John Smith.

The village of Greengairs has a post office, a social club and a political problem. When the Lanarkshire coalfield powered Scotland's industrial revolution, Greengairs had a reason to exist. It is now a street of council houses sitting in a barren landscape of abandoned open-cast workings. Men came to the collieries from Ireland in the 19th century, bringing the fire and ice of religion and politics. It is elemental stuff that will not disappear.

I'm with the last miner in Greengairs. Right now, we are ensconced in the social club, ordering half-pints of lager shandy under the watchful eye of King William of Orange astride his white steed. The miner, tall and straight in a black donkey jacket, is a strikingly handsome man in his fifties, his eyes an icy Baltic blue, common in parts of Scotland where Poles and Lithuanians once came to heave coal. But looks can deceive. The Lithuanians were devout Roman Catholics. He is Presbyterian—and a staunch Conservative.

He blames the Labour council for the state of village roads, for the heavy lorries that rumble over the potholes, for just about every calamity that doesn't literally appear from the heavens: "The path to my child's school has water pouring down it. It's a muck hole. Greengairs is being run down . . . we are forsaken for our Presbyterian faith."

The Labour Party lost the safe ward of Greengairs on Monklands district council to the Scottish National Party at last year's municipal election, since Labour's Roman Catholic candidate was deemed unsuitable by the Greengairs electorate. "I voted tactically for the SNP," said one Unionist, who would normally burn his Union Jack before endorsing Scottish independence.

Religion and politics long ago called a truce in Scotland. The Protestant working class has supported Labour for several generations. Monklands, which combines the mainly Catholic town of Coatbridge with mainly Protestant Airdrie and its villages, also returns Labour members. The likes of the last miner in Greengairs seemed to be a dying breed in politics and occupation. Until now.

All 17 Labour members of the Monklands district council are Roman Catholic. The local authority is dominated by a clique of councillors from Coatbridge, which lies in the Monklands West constituency of Tom Clarke, shadow secretary of state for Scotland. The local paper last year revealed that councillors gave friends and relatives special green forms when applying for jobs. At least 22 Monklands employees are relatives of senior Labour councillors.

The best recent example of industrial relations, Monklands-style, was the sacking of four refuse workers who sold scrap metal from the council tip. This was common practice and approved by their supervisor—a perk of a low-paid job. An industrial tribunal earlier this month found in favour of the men, awarded them £36,000 compensation and recommended reinstatement. But Monklands is defying all interventions from John Smith and its own trade unions. It will appeal against the tribunal decision, at considerable public expense, on a number of technical grounds.

One of the sacked men's jobs has already been filled by the brother-in-law of councillor Arthur Fitzpatrick. Fitzpatrick chaired the internal disciplinary hearing that found against the men. His wife, Jean, already holds a senior housing post with the council. Asked what qualifications she has, Fitzpatrick replies: "She has been in the department for 11 years, as far as I know she has highers [A levels] and used to teach secretarial studies."

Councillors were officially involved in appointing the lowliest employees—until forced to change the system by a consultant's investigation imposed this year by the Scottish executive of the Labour Party. Rebel Labour councillors, and dissidents within the constituency parties, say the system goes further than simple nod-and-wink nepotism. They claim the council's recruiting policy is based on "a favour for a favour". You join the party, turn up to vote for the same electoral slate every year, and are rewarded with the assistant caretaker's job on the sheltered housing complex.

The system deals out punishment as well as rewards. Tom McFarlane, a caretaker who

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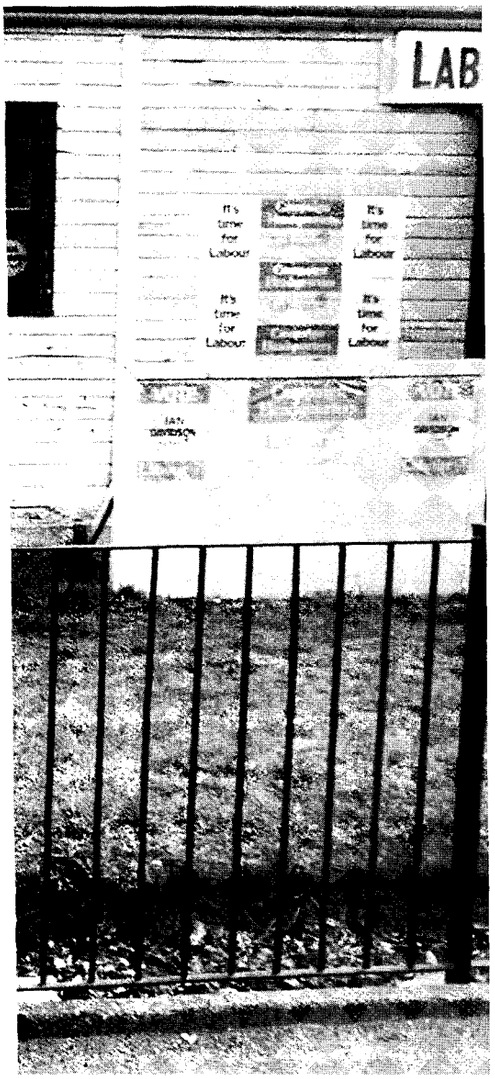

John Smith turns his back on local difficulties outside his CLP offices in Airdrie

was also a member of the district Labour Party, made the mistake of clashing with the party secretary last year. Within weeks, his job was restructured out of existence and MacFarlane offered early retirement.

John Murphy, a Strathclyde regional councillor and Nupe shop steward who, again, worked as a caretaker in Monklands, was suspended this year for publicly backing the "jobs for the boys" allegations. He has now retired on health grounds.

Four Labour councillors from Airdrie—Tommy Morgan, Jim Logue, Peter Sullivan and Brian Brady—helped to expose the green form scandal. They have now been suspended for a second time for criticising the way that council spending is allocated. Coatbridge received ten times more money than Airdrie and the local villages for capital projects over three years—despite it having a smaller population.

Much of this spending was approved by committees run by a handful of men known jokingly in the area as "the Monklands mafia": Jim Brooks, leader of the council, Bob Gilson, the provost (mayor), and Eddie Cairns, the former provost and John Smith's election agent of ten years.

Shadow-cabinet members make speeches criticising the number of public bodies where Tory placemen make decisions in secret. But Monklands district council has set up trusts and limited companies to deal with any commercial decisions it would rather the public, and members of the Labour Party, did not know about. Brooks and Gilson are directors of four such companies dealing with land, business and shopping developments. Brooks and his brother Joseph have also been directors of non-council building and property businesses now in liquidation.

A row blew up in the 1980s when the council overturned its own policy to change the planning designation of a piece of land bought by the Brooks brothers. Its value multiplied overnight as a result, though Brooks acted properly by declaring an interest and the Scottish Secretary ruled out any investigation. The fate of a government development loan to a Brooks company is currently being investigated by the Scottish Enterprise Agency.

No evidence of discrimination by the council was found by a Labour Party inquiry or by the consultants appointed to look at recruitment. But no one needs to ask "are you Catholic?" if recruiting is based on who you know. Sectarianism also has a historical role in abuses of power. Newspapers in Scotland carried classified ads saying "Protestants only need apply" as late as the 1950s. One Labour councillor, a teacher, remembers his father advising: "Get an education, son, because Catholics never get apprenticeships in the steelworks."

He should also have recommended a Labour Party membership card. Labour provided Catholics with a door into public life when other paths were blocked by discrimination. This has shaped politics in the west of Scotland.

Monklands' citadel is cemented by revenge. Most of its inhabitants are middle-aged men, still motivated by the wrongs of the 1950s. "They take the view that the boot's on the other foot now. But it is exa-cerbating old sectarian divisions," said one party dissident. The rebel councillors and the constituency activists are younger and better educated than the old guard. To call them rebels would, perhaps, be to apply a misnomer. They are Catholic, but they define their position in terms of political ideology, not religion.

As long as it worked for him, Smith ignored the shouts of those wishing to revitalise the local Labour Party

The Labour Party's Scottish HQ in Keir Hardie House in Glasgow has investigated Monklands. A resulting report in March recommended changes in the way officials were elected to the constituency Labour Parties and the district Labour Party.

Glasnost from Glasgow is bringing results. Rebels recently won control of Monklands East. John Smith looked on gloomily as his election agent, Eddie Cairns, was ousted as secretary after 30 years.

Smith has always refused to speak about the row—even when his surgery was picketed by local activists. He is not responsible for the political edifice built in Monklands. That was largely the creation of his neighbour, Tom Clarke, who was provost of Monklands for many years and actually "talent spotted" Brooks. But Smith did nothing to dismantle the machine. As long as it worked for him, he ignored the shouts of men and women wishing to revitalise the local party.

A branch official wrote to Smith in the late 1980s about lack of democracy in Monklands. No action was taken. When the row first blew up in the Scottish press, the Labour leader gave his constituency party a stern talking to. Smith's comments were not aimed at the "mafia", but at rebels who spoke to journalists.

Smith even appeared to back the "mafia"'s campaign against the *Airdrie and Coatbridge Advertiser*, which won a press award for its coverage of the row. Council advertising—the financial lifeblood of local papers—was withdrawn. Notices were placed instead in an alternative council propaganda sheet. Smith's warm endorsement appeared on the front page of the first issue. And the party leader recommended Brooks for a place on the recently formed Monklands Hospital Trust.

Smith's complacency gives the party's Scottish opponents political ammunition. Monklands symbolises Labour's tendency to take its heartland voters for granted. Here the problem becomes more than a sectarian local difficulty since, while Labour is the establishment in Scotland, the country has the lowest party membership of any UK "region". Figures leaked earlier this year show numbers dipping under 20,000 for the first time. Glasgow Provan, which covers the enormous housing scheme of Easterhouse and has some of the highest poverty levels in Europe, could only muster 75 members.

Last year, John Smith appointed the youthful Jack McConnell as general secretary to revitalise the Scottish party. McConnell, 32, a former leader of the energetic Stirling District Council, pledged to build membership and attract young people, who are increasingly straying to the SNP and Scottish Militant Labour.

McConnell's mission is hardly assisted by attitudes like those of John Smith's right-hand man in Monklands, Eddie Cairns. He is reported to have said the job of a constituency party secretary was to "return the sitting Labour member". No more, no less. Who needs campaigns?

As long as the Monklands' citadel stands, it will cast a shadow over McConnell's efforts. It is the ugliest manifestation of the perceived Labour establishment. It ignores Keir Hardie House's recommendations like so much junk mail. The Labour group can do as it pleases, unlike constituency parties. Open up our committees? Change our leadership? You can't make us . . .

The "mafia" could dominate John Smith's neighbourhood for years to come. Tory backbench barbs will fire with every new scandal. Monklands is already a municipal millstone round the Labour leader's neck. Soon it will feel like a concrete overcoat.

Joan McAlpine is a journalist on the "Scotsman"

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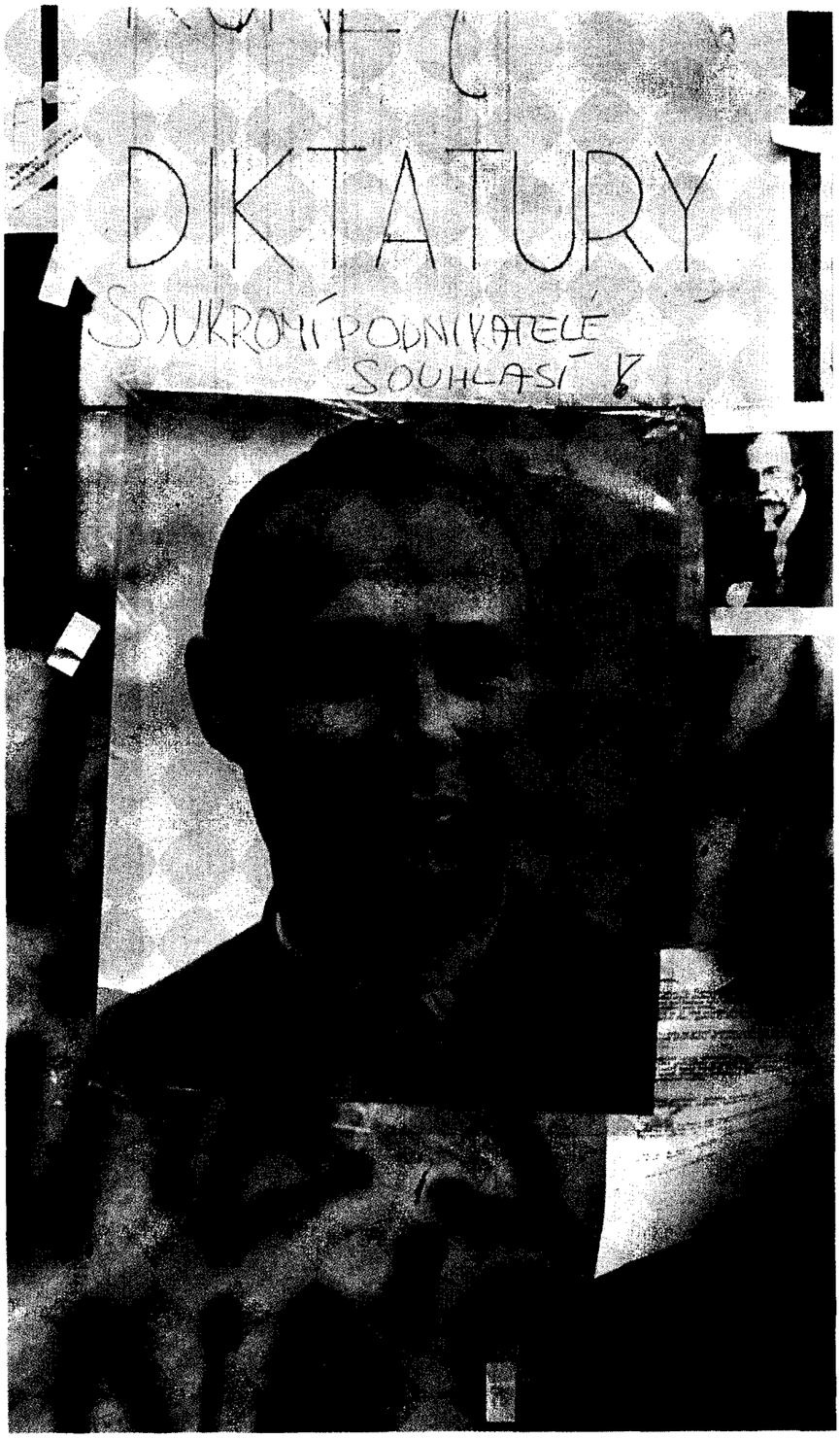
A quarter-century after the invasion that ended "socialism with a human face", the Czechoslovak 1968 generation is politically marginal. **Ben Webb** reports

The Prague Spring takes a fall



Rex Features

Twenty-five years ago this week, Alexander Dubcek and the reformist leadership of the Czechoslovak Communist Party were summoned to the Kremlin for some lessons in communism.

"Summoned" is perhaps the wrong word. They had been abducted—held at gunpoint, incarcerated, then flown to Moscow in miltary aircraft—after the invasion of their country by the Soviet Union and four other members of the Warsaw Pact. Dubcek, the Czech party's general secretary and the public face of the "Prague Spring", had reached the point of nervous collapse. His first reported words when he received news of the invasion, just before midnight on 20 August, had been: "So they finally did it—and to me!"

His distress was understandable, in his own terms: all through 1968 Dubcek had stressed his loyalty to the bloc and his moderation. The reforms in Czechoslovakia would not affect its adherence to the Warsaw Pact; there would be no repeat of Hungary in 1956; in fact, allowing a bloc country to pursue an independent policy could only reflect well on the "socialist camp"—it would be an example, if not a model, for all of Europe.

The man across the table in Moscow, Leonid Brezhnev, was not impressed. "For us," he said, "the results of the second world war are inviolable." The cordon sanitaire of eastern Europe was Soviet property; and the communist parties of the bloc were its custodians. Let that custodianship slip, and you are written out of our comradeship; you are no longer dependable. Tito can protest, as can Ceausescu, as can Berlinguer; but where will that get you? The western communist movement you appeal to will be nothing for 50 years. And how many tanks have they?

And that was that. Zdenek Mlynar, then secretary to the Czechoslovak party's central committee and a Dubcek confidant, wrote later of his utter disillusionment: "During the Prague Spring, I had no illusions that the party leadership in Moscow might see our reforms as some kind of desirable model. Nor did I suffer under any illusions that the Soviet Union might have anything but a standard great-power foreign policy. Yet I still believed that it paid homage to the idea of socialism. That was an illusion. For the Moscow politburo, socialism had become identical with its own power, with the social order it had created in the Soviet Union."

That was precisely right: a year later, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union codified its bottom line as the doctrine of "actually-existing socialism". Socialism was not just some idea, or even the ideas of Marx and Lenin, to be interpreted willy-nilly. Socialism was existing socialism, and anything else was deviation. Do not argue communism with Brezhnev; this is it, and all you will get.

It was not as if Dubcek had not been warned. A fortnight before the invasion, Janos Kadar, the Hungarian party chief, a man hardened in the "normalisation" of his own country, had taken Dubcek aside, asking almost despairingly: "Do you really not know what kind of people you are dealing with?"

Apparently not. Even after his humiliation in Moscow, Dubcek continued as party sec-

Alexander Dubcek, hero of the Prague Spring, is now seen as at best a purveyor of illusions

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retary into 1969, hoping that a bit of backtracking and a personal understanding with Brezhnev would preserve something of the Prague Spring, and prevent the primitives and Moscow placemen from taking over.

His misunderstanding was portentous: by the time he was deposed Czechoslovakia's own "normalisation" had begun; and the popular support he had hoped to keep had dissolved. On 16 January 1969 Jan Palach, a young philosophy student, immolated himself in Wenceslas Square in protest at the capitulation to Soviet aggression. Czech reform was dead. It was not immediately apparent, but so was reform communism.

Zdenek Mlynar noted in his 1980 book, *Night Frost in Prague*, that while in Moscow as part of the Czech negotiating team, he had been reminded of Kadar's question. His answer to himself was: "We had been fools, but our folly was that of reform communism."

There was a terrible disproportion between what the Czechs thought Communism could be made to be, and what the Soviets were telling them it was. Yet disproportion had been the rule for some time. When the tanks rolled over the Czechoslovak border, they met not armed raiders, but holiday traffic. The mighty Soviet army arrived ill-provisioned and even worse informed. Some of the troops had to beg for bread; others were so dazzled by the affluence of the country they had invaded, that they thought they had strayed into West Germany.

The greatest discrepancy was between what had actually been attempted and the Warsaw Pact's riposte. The writer Ludvik Vaculik drafted the "Two Thousand Words" declaration that came to be seen as the clearest statment of the Prague Spring's aspirations and limitations in late June 1968. He pointed to the apparent modesty of its record: "Freedom of expression is really our only democratic achievement this year."

The late Milan Simecka wrote of the seemingly unbalanced Soviet response to the Prague Spring: " Up to August 1968, disorder in Czechoslovakia chiefly entailed superficial changes. It was above all the change in the appearance of public life that provoked, perturbed and distressed the allies in the socialist camp and part of the political and economic establishment here at home. But I do not intend to conclude naively that Soviet troops came mistakenly—as a result of an erroneous interpretation. It must have been clear to the Soviet leadership that disorder in outward appearances was the harbinger of more thoroughgoing changes."

Three weeks before the invasion, the *Prague Reporter* had commented on the series of meetings where the Czech party leadership had earlier been called to account: "Relations with our allies have sharpened to a razor's edge. The frontier of excommunication has been crossed.

"We have in fact not committed any of the sins we are being accused of, and we were not engaged in any deliberate and perfidious liquidation of socialism 'on the sly', nor did we intend to liquidate relations with our allies and jump the hedge. Neverthless, we are introducing to the scene something else, which cannot become a part of the propaganda line, but which is the real crux of the matter.

While the former Czechoslovakia suffered through 21 years of "normalisation", one sector of society enjoyed a boom. The StB (State Security), after a worrying patch during the Prague Spring, found new purpose and favour. It kept files on millions of Czechs and Slovaks, and enlisted thousands of agents.

These files are now at the heart of a secret service scandal described by Jiri Dienstbier, the former dissident and Czechoslovakia's foreign minister from the velvet revolution to June 1992, as "like the tip of an iceberg in a whole system of corruption which is spreading here".

The present case centres on a former StB agent, Vaclav Wallis, who has been accused of selling information gathered by the StB and its successor before and after the fall of communism. Wallis has made his own allegations. The Czech media have speculated that secret files on the government's privatisation programme, as well as on politicians' private lives, were illegally released. Other observers detect a pattern of corruption involving the former communist nomenklatura, businessmen and politicians.

This is not the first case of unauthorised release of the state's mountainous files. An earlier scandal involved the sale of data on two million Czechs from the Interior Ministry's central registry to Procter and Gamble for use in an advertising campaign. And the publication of a list of thousands of alleged StB informers last year in Rude Kravo (Red Cow), a right-wing magazine, has still to be explained.

The case of Jan Kavan, who is quoted in the accompanying article, remains similarly unresolved. Kavan, a key link between Czechoslovak dissidents and the west from 1969 to 1989, was accused in early 1991 of collaboration with the StB, initially in 1969, while a student leader in London, and as recently as 1989, when he returned from exile. Kavan, an MP in the first post-communist parliament, responded that he had not known that the education attaché with whom he had dealt in 1969 was an StB agent, and that the alleged meetings with the StB in 1989 were in fact interrogations that followed his arrest on arriving in Prague.

In the meantime, Kavan's classified StB files had started to do the rounds, prompting him to sue "persons unknown" for releasing confidential information. The case, which was rapidly ensnarled by legal wrangling, is still pending: it did nothing to prevent extracts from Kavan's StB files appearing last year in Czech and British newspapers in reports of a successful attempt by Thames Television to overturn a 1982 Broadcasting Complaints Commission ruling against it over a Kavan complaint.

Kavan is still determined to clear his name–even though many of his erstwhile dissident friends have suggested that he drop his defence in the interests of the reputation of the Czech Republic.

"We have introduced the spectre of the liquidation of the absolute power of the bureaucratic caste which has been bound by a thousand threads of mutual corruption and mutual interests with its foreign counterparts. Such is the extent of our sin. We do not endanger socialism: on the contrary. We endanger bureaucracy which has been slowly but surely burying socialism on a world scale. For this we can hardly expect bureaucracy's brotherly cooperation and understanding."

"Normalisation" in Czechoslovakia began under the motto of "avoiding the worst". Yet as Dubcek attempted to defuse popular pressure to mollify the invader and the homegrown Stalinists, he lost whatever leverage he had hoped to gain. The popular mood changed from passive resistance to despair. Once this had happened, Dubcek was expendable. What followed was a social experiment whose scale dwarfed the Prague Spring.

Systematically, the party, the administration and the country's institutions were purged of radicals and reformers. One-third of the party's 1.5 million members were expelled. Unreliable individuals were sacked from teaching posts, editorial chairs, media positions. Others were towed back into line with the threat of the sack, or the threat that their children would be deprived of higher education and jobs. Publications were shut down and blacklists compiled. The psychological process was finely calibrated. As Simecka put it: "Although individuals were chosen as the targets, the blast was also felt in the vicinity: the rest of the workplace, circles of friends, sympathetic colleagues. When a bombshell went off, everyone took cover."

It was, above all, a bureaucratic terror: pseudo-legal procedures were followed. Rewards accompanied punishments: salary increases were promised once institutions had been purged of "right-wing elements". Normalisation took on its own momentum as a mood of despondency grew. In Simecka's words: "The ruling party of existing socialism became the vanguard of mediocrity, obedience and fear." Social corruption was the counterpoint to the purges and blacklists. This had legal and non-legal forms: there were bonuses and job openings on offer in return for political loyalty on the one hand; and toleration, even expectation, of theft and pilfering on the other.

The "civilised violence" of normalisation produced a large literature of disillusion and resistance, as well as some high sociological satire. (A key work in the latter category is Simecka's *The Restoration of Order: The Normalisation of Czechoslovakia.*) From exile, Zdenek Mlynar made his own contribution to the genre: "Where in Hungary after 1956 relations between the regime and society gradually acquired certain elements of a social contract, these relations were in Czechoslovakia moulded as part of a sale and purchase contract; social groups and individuals sold their autonomy to the 'party and government' in exchange for a bearable living standard. This act of purchase and sale did not expand the factors of cooperation but merely marked the commitment of the seller to tolerate the behaviour of the buyer as long as he was in a position to pay."

Today, Mlynar sees the legacy of the period: "The period of normalisation continues to

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have an effect. It represented a profound break in the social and psychological atmosphere. The belief, the hope in an alteration of the socio-political order was gone after the capitulation. There was no hope—only cynicism. Whole generations grew up who had lost all perspective. They were oriented to personal needs. The most important characteristic was a capacity to conform to the rules laid down by the state. If one gave them approval, then it was possible to pursue one's own goals in the private sphere. Passivity was rewarded."

Milos Zeman, an economist who now leads the Czech Republic's struggling Social Democrats, concurs: "By the early 1970s, there really looked to be no way out. The whole nation went into a form of internal exile, and people became immensely cynical."

Three years after the "Velvet Revolution" that ended 21 years of normalisation and 41 years of communism, the political landscape has changed beyond recognition. The former Czechoslovakia was peremptorily divided as Vaclav Klaus' right-wing government hurtled toward the free market, in the process running circles round the former dissidents who led the first post-communist administration. Two months ago, a law was passed declaring the Communist Party a "criminal organisation" throughout its history. In the pro-government press, "leftist" and "socialist" are terms not just of derision but of hatred. The preferred epithet is "Bolshevik", a term applied to former dissidents and leftists as well as pillars of the old regime. The Prague Spring is a distant, often uncherished, memory.

According to Mlynar: "How the Prague Spring is seen is largely a matter of generations. Twenty-five years ago is a matter of history for those who grew up in the period of normalisation. It is not a living experience. If they think about it at all, they see the changes that were aimed at as something cosmetic."

Bolshevik is a term applied to former dissidents and leftists, as well as to pillars of the old regime

Jan Kavan, a student leader in 1968 who spent 20 years in exile in Britain and is now a foreign policy adviser to Milos Zeman's Social Democrats, agrees. "Among one section of the population—I suppose those of 45 upward—who were reform Communists in 1968, or entertained the possibility of a third way, there is—how to put it?—certainly not nostalgia, but a feeling that the experiment of the Prague Spring was worthwhile. A large section, particularly of young people, see the Prague Spring as a dead end, an attempt to reform the unreformable. The brunt of the charge is that it created illusions."

Zbynek Zeman, an Anglo-Czech historian who chronicled events in Prague in 1968, says: "The veterans of the Prague Spring are now a generation isolated, pushed out of power. They produced political moralists, but no politicians who have lasted. The main reason that there is little nostalgia for the Prague Spring is the sheer unpopularity of the term socialism." He foresees "four or five more years of primitive capitalism".

The peculiar, instrumental relation between the party and people during the normalisation period is held by some people to explain the visceral anti-communism that emerged not before, but after the Velvet Revolution. As Zbynek Zeman remarks: "Most people felt compromised, because there was collusion between the party and the people. When the party was of no further use, people turned on it and condemned it and all its works."

Jan Kavan argues that the new anti-Communism has little in common with the earlier opposition to communism: "The human rights opposition (Charter 77) avoided ideological language, but it never expressed its vision in classic anti-communist terms. Those who now speak in anti-communist terms are mainly loyal communists become vicious or people from the grey zone."

The term "grey zone" was coined in a Czech samizdat journal in the 1980s to describe those people, usually highly qualified, who were neither in opposition nor in sympathy with the former regime. They displayed what one samizdat author called a "disinclination to martyrdom—a very common human attribute indeed". Vaclav Klaus is the most eminent member of this group.

The prominent dissident and sociologist Jirina Siklova dealt with the "grey zone" in a prescient article written shortly before the Velvet Revolution. "They hold various functions, adhere to formal political rituals," she wrote, "and then all the more do they rail at the totalitarian regime for this, their humiliation and their self-humiliation." These people, she said, are "the ones who will take over the leadership of this society". She warned dissidents not to become "too focused on their own courage".

Meanwhile, the hostility of the right seems focused on former reform communists and leftists, in the right's eyes the purveyors of a terrible illusion. Yaroslav Sabata, with his nine-year jail record the "champion" political prisoner of the Czech opposition, was soon after the Velvet Revolution attacked as implicated in the secret police because of his chairmanship of an Interior Ministry oversight commission during the Prague Spring. There have been suggestions that Zdenek Mlynar should be tried for treason because of his role in the Moscow negotiations 25 years ago. Accusations fly.

"Of course, the accusation 'communist' is used in everyday competition between the political parties," says Mlynar. "There are no trials, which is perhaps unfortunate, because without them, the finger can be pointed at anyone. People can be harmed or ruined by accusations. The problem for any left-oriented or reform politics in the Czech Republic today is that the younger generation has only the experience of the period of normalisation. They are presented with the false alternatives of following the policy of the government or going back to the old days. Any other kind of politics, any third way, is identified as left, as negative. For the moment it has no chance."

Sky Blue Pink

"There is no question over the long-term future of Euro Disney. The park is successful, it will remain open for 365 days a year, and we are confident that the financial issues will be resolved"—Phillippe Bourguignon, chairman of Euro Disney

Carry on without compunction,
Never try to cut a loss,
Put away the final unction:
Please remember who's the boss.

We have built a monumental
Testament to perfect taste;
Deficits are incidental—
Debt is not the same as waste.

We're prepared to offer pleasure,
Taking people for a ride—
This will be a national treasure
Once we've turned the tide aside.

Government is pure Fantasia
In our land of sky blue pink
Enterprises, where yer pays yer
Money for a jink-tank think.

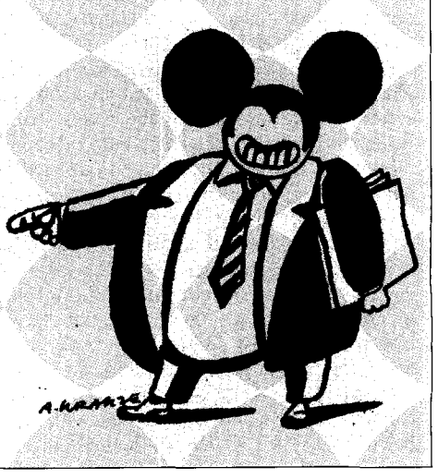
Join the Tory roller-coaster
With its goofy one-track mind:
Hot air travel? It can boast a
Theme park for the ill-defined.

These are not our closing credits,
This is not a sinking ship.
Sickly vision? No: we've said—it's
British to its squeaky pip.

Have a nice day, all together,
Franchise out the sand and sea,
Privatise the wind and weather.
Virtual reality!

Blips are only temporary,
As we'll tell this autumn's House:
Let our citizens be merry,
Led (of course) by Mickey Mouse.

Bill Greenwell



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Nationalists who won't nationalise

A few years ago, one of the leading figures in the Scottish National Party, Alex Neil, made a monumental mistake. He coined the slogan, "Scotland Free in '93". It had a terrific galvanising effect at the time, in the manner of David Steel's "Go back to your constituencies and prepare for government". But it was horribly embarrassing when the SNP failed to gain a single extra seat in the general election.

The SNP actually did quite well. Its share of the vote rose from 14 per cent in 1987 to 21.5 per cent in 1992. But the Tories also increased their vote very slightly, making their resilience—after a wipe-out had been predicted—the big story. John Major had elevated the defence of the Union into one of his main campaign planks, and, defying all predictions, the tactic had worked. In the circumstances, the SNP was bound to feel sheepish.

Labour and the Lib Dems were no less downcast. All the hard work that they had put into the Scottish constitutional convention had come to nought. Labour wondered whether they had got too carried away by the home rule hype. The Lib Dems wondered whether they had got too close to Labour. A period of reflection for all three opposition parties in Scotland was in order.

Since then, there has been some spluttering of the nationalist and home rule flame. Scotland United, a loose coalition of nationalist Labour politicians, trade unionists and pop stars, was launched immediately after the election, attracting 5,000 people to its rally. In December, during the European summit in Edinburgh, 25,000 people attended a Democracy rally. The momentum, however, has not been sustained. The Scottish Constitutional Convention, which the SNP never supported anyway, has virtually died a death.

The SNP leader, Alex Salmond, has spent the summer giving a series of keynote speeches on the future of his party, fine-tuning its image along the way. He has already delivered four speeches and has two more to go before next month's party conference in Dunoon. The most important one of all was delivered last week in Oban.

First, there was the good news. SNP support in the polls had been consistently above 20 per cent for two years, he stressed. This was no failure, but a high point for the party. He conceded, however, that the election had been a grave disappointment. With a dig at Neil, he quipped: "Next time we will keep our catchy one-liners to ourselves until after the votes are counted!"

Salmond also challenged head-on some of the well-worn excuses for losing. In particular, he took a swipe at Jim Sillars, the left-wing SNP victor of the Glasgow Govan by-election, who lost his seat to Labour. In a famous, bitter speech, Sillars said after the election that there was "a serious question in my mind about the character and ability of the Scottish people to face up to the responsibility that goes with independence . . . From January on, we were telling the world we were heading for independence. It wasn't just the SNP saying it, it was the people of Scotland themselves, puffing up their chests and saying, 'We're going to do it.'"

Nonsense, replied Salmond in last week's speech. It was ridiculous to blame the Scottish people. There was "little useful purpose in our 25 per cent of the population demanding that the other three-quarters go and sit on the stool of repentance until they learn their lesson and mend their ways". Nor was there any point blaming the English for Scotland's ills, another common trait of nationalists. "Scotland is a developed European democracy, which has the ability at each election to change our political circumstances. If we chose not to do that, then that is the SNP's fault for not explaining the case clearly enough."

The repositioning of the SNP is not so different from the process Paddy Ashdown went through

This was grown-up talk. As to the future direction of the party, however, Salmond's message was a combination of wishful thinking and hard-nosed realism. It is axiomatic for Salmond that, freed from English shackles, an independent Scotland will thrive. But what sort of economy should it have? Here, Salmond is widely held to have moved his party to the right, although he denies the charge.

In his second speech of the series, delivered last month, Salmond argued against demand management and in favour of greater competitiveness. He also distanced the SNP from a policy of nationalisation, telling the newspaper, *Scotland on Sunday*: "You can't have a hazy belief that it will be OK if we intervene here, nationalise this. If we don't like that sector we'll take it into public ownership. That's silly and stupid. The government's job is to provide the springboard from which our industry can compete successfully."

As a counterbalance, Salmond has been simultaneously pursuing a radical social policy, blaming Labour as much as the Tories for Scotland's poor housing stock, and promising to set matters right (once independence has been achieved, of course) by building 15,000 new public sector homes a year. "Economic pragmatism" and "social radicalism" are the watchwords that he wants the SNP to be identified with in future.

The repositioning of his party in this way is not so very different from the process Paddy Ashdown went through a few years back. The hope then was to make the Liberal Democrats more right-wing than the Tories on the economy (or more genuinely competitive, at any rate) and more left-wing than Labour on social issues. The message got garbled and was never properly understood, but it was an attempt by the Lib Dems to carve out a distinctive political identity. By going down the same road, Salmond is trying to give the SNP an identity that is not based solely on its demand for independence.

The Labour vote is looking increasingly soft in Scotland. The shadow secretary of state, Tom Clarke, is considered ineffectual and may well lose his place this autumn in the shadow cabinet. There is talk, most of it wild, of Labour collapsing in Scotland as it has done in a few previously rock-solid, but rotten Labour boroughs such as Tower Hamlets in London. The proposed break-up of Strathclyde regional council, Labour's great fiefdom, may accelerate its decline.

Labour lost ground during the anti-poll tax campaign, the Timex dispute and water privatisation. However, Labour is feeling the heat in its urban heartlands more from Scottish Militant Labour than the SNP. Militant has performed remarkably well in local by-elections, winning several wards this year in Glasgow and Dundee. With Jim Sillars no longer an MP, the SNP may find it difficult to keep hold of its shrinking working-class, inner-city base.

Voting with the Conservative government in a crucial Maastricht division on the Committee of the Regions has not helped the party's radical image. Labour had a field day reviving memories of the Tartan Tories and three party spokesmen, including Alex Neil, resigned their posts.

These days, Labour MPs more frequently dismiss the SNP as Scotland's "Liberals", meaning that they are a bunch of opportunists who will do anything to steal a march on others. Alex Salmond would not admit to anything of the sort, of course. But there, in his speeches, is the implicit recognition that the SNP will not thrive unless it sharpens up its image.

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SIDELINERS

The director of Fishguard's leading art gallery finished his telephone call, volunteering, "I've just been talking to Cynog Dafis about you." In mid-August, the haggard local Plaid-Green MP was still beavering away with an anxious local businessman. After having softsoaped the amenable previous Welsh secretary, David Hunt, they were proving incapable of penetrating the Teflon skin of his Thatcherite successor, John ("Vulcan") Redwood.

It is easy to see Cynog Dafis simply as a double-headed surprise breakthrough: Plaid Cymru's first west Wales bridgehead-taker and the first MP to represent the green movement. Because London-based media were so astonished that John Major had confounded the polls to win in April 1992, they ignored Dafis's doubled vote, which was as surprising as last weekend's world championship win by black Welshman Colin Jackson. Exhausted Dafis may still be working in August because he fears the 6 per cent lead he established in April 1992 to defeat the veteran Liberal Democrat Geraint Howells (now Lord Geraint) may be vulnerable to the new Lib Dem candidate, David Davies. The Liberal Democrats' rising tide in southern England may lap back into the old strongholds of Welsh Liberalism.

To be fair to Dafis, he never let his preoccupation with Welsh nationalism and green issues interfere with constituency issues. Even his May 1992 maiden speech concentrated on the risk that privatising BR might threaten rail connections to Fishguard and Aberystwyth, both of them in his Ceredigion and North Pembroke constituency; cleverly, he emphasised the need for such public transport to reduce CO_2 emissions.

Although the young "incomers" to seaside towns like Cardigan may be impressed by the 200-plus green questions he put forward with the help of the researcher supplied by the Green Party, this does not grab most of his farmer-voters. Farmers become "green" when issues touch farming, like the impact on sheep of persistent windborne caesium pollution from Chernobyl in north Welsh soil or the new possibility that "mad cow" disease may also be caused by the chemicals in organophosphorus sheepdips. Dafis shows he is on the farmers' side by complaining about the "crippling" cost of updating local abattoirs and about the loss of money farmers earned at local livestock auctions to the bank accounts of insolvent auctioneers.

Dafis is also active in protecting local jobs. He helped father a compromise between the local Sealink Stena ferry company, which sails to Ireland, and Fishguard fishermen, excluded from their usual moorings for security reasons. His biggest challenge is to help find jobs for those due for dismissal from the sprawling Trecwm Royal Navy ordnance depot.

He has also cheered up local teachers frustrated by the government's constant chopping and changing. An English teacher and department head for 32 years, he was able to chart the impact on teachers' morale in fighting the Education Bill. But to show he can be constructive, he put down an

EDWARD PEARCE

What on earth can a political commentator do in the silly season, except grumble?

This is not altogether an article about not writing an article. But it is hard to resist a grumble about the season's poverty, "the silly season", as all newspaper backbenches know it. Parliament is dispersed—the shadow cabinet presumably to Tuscany, Mr Major shrewdly to the Douro Valley, which is a sort of Tuscany or Provence that nobody knows about, a string of delightful country towns set in the rich undulations of northern Portugal; and anyone who has had six months of Bill Cash and his orchestra deserves it.

But not merely are the politicians gone, political business is in a state of inanition. Anything goes or, rather, anything gets a headline. A querulous article by Cecil Parkinson (by now probably yachting in the Antilles), telling the government to pull its socks up, won coverage last week, not because this dog biting *this* government is startling (absolutely nothing to what Cecil said at the Archer party two years back), but as the only bit of argument anyone could get their hands on. This is a time when politics is manned by duty officers, when amnesty prevails and newspapers do round-ups and profiles, while home politics news-pages gracefully cede space to sport, which, with the Walker Cup, a last Test match and the start of football, is actually *working*.

Not merely are the politicians gone; political business is in a state of inanition. Anything goes, or gets a headline

And yet, this isn't how it always was, and needn't be how it will be now. The military tradition until modern times was to save war until the harvest was in. There is a parallel with hunting here, which wouldn't want to spoil its excellent relations with the farmers by riding down the barley, and so waits to pursue its ritual sacrifice over the new stubble. It was upon such principles that Louis XIV and Frederick the Great made war; Napoleon was something of a stinker, inclined to a John Birt-style continuous service. Hitler, however, showed shreds of social savoir-faire by launching his great offensive in September, permitting men in surplices the length of Christendom to move with oiled perfection from "All is safely gathered in" to "Oh God our help in ages past" and "Onward Christian soldiers".

Oddly traditional, that, from a somewhat ostentatious innovator, and surely Mrs Thatcher with her promised memoirs will be doing no less. I suppose the party conferences are a species of war-substitute, more like a ritual dance before hostilities. A month away yet, beginning with the excitable Liberal Democrats, who actually enjoy the things, conferences will be signs of the great lethargic battle being joined again, of Dr Copelius's dolls twitching and stirring in their box for the delight of children generally.

It is a measure of their synthetic stridency that no one gets thanked at the conference of any party, not even these professional moderates, the Liberal Democrats, for any sort of fairness or balance. Notoriously, conference is where you take not your harp, but your handcuffs, the place where you demand retributive punishment; or alternatively, call down heaven on the evils of capitalism or denounce both the other parties for their violent extremism. Conference is also the place where leaders go to be worshipped, and where activists go to adore. Neil Kinnock was happy at conference as never quite in Westminster, not from vanity, but because, on the broad moral canvas of a party debate, he could talk to his people in their own language. So could Mrs Thatcher; and by the end, the government outing to Brighton or Blackpool had grown thoroughly unwholesome. Not just 11-minute standing ovations, but in parts of the auditorium, a hint of groupie mania little short of synchronised knicker-throwing.

And of course synchronised it was—laser displays, warm-ups and that awful special language with which all politicians, but especially Conservatives, talk to their supporters—somewhere between *Blue Peter* and Huey Long.

The phrase "patronising" has been done to death by the politically correct, but the oily fizz of a cringebucket chairman introducing a cabinet minister to a crowd of registered adults, as if bringing on Father Christmas in a home for the retarded gives "patronising" unfettered flight.

The entire business, including whichever left-wing nag first gets cheered for appealing to the example of Aneurin Bevan, is really a folk custom and part of the show—like a pipe band marching towards the artillery . . .

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The letter last week from Barbara Follett and Glenys Thornton, explaining why Emily's List decided to sponsor only pro-choice women into parliament, has achieved the expected response.

The angriest, and shortest, comes from Ann Farmer in Woodford Green, vice-chair of the Labour Life Group: "Funny how the Emily's List backers are keen to deny that they are in favour of abortion," writes the amused Ms Farmer, "when this appears to be the only issue that unites their ranks." She continues: "One could be forgiven [although I suspect this is a long shot] for thinking that their aim in getting women into parliament is solely to promote abortion."

A more moderate letter comes from Angela Kennedy, also of Woodford Green, who claims that Follett and Thornton's accusation that the Labour Life Group mounted vicious attacks on people who disagree with them "very unfair". No, the organisation has simply "mounted a letter campaign". So that's all right then.

However, it is with Follett and Thornton's view of Labour Party policy that Kennedy takes most exception: "Labour is, by the way, not for the 'woman's right to choose', but it is for its members right to vote according to conscience. By denying pro-life women support, they deny us our right to conscience and integrity."

And the right to vote against the 1967 Abortion Act, which, as Follett and Thornton have previously pointed out, "gives millions of other British women the rights to choose how to control their own bodies and their own fertility".

Albert Beale, from London N1, is incensed at the lack of principle exhibited by Frank Jackson, vice-chair of the World Disarmament Campaign (Letters, 13 August). Now the unfortunate Jackson was actually writing to accuse Tim Webb of MSF of the very same thing, and suggesting inter alia that Webb's members should be arguing for socially useful production, not the continuation of the European Fighter Aircraft project simply in order to preserve jobs.

"If you're consistent," says Beale, "you can't say 'to argue that we should go on producing [weapons] is little short of obscene', and then imply that people should go on producing them while trying for something different.". Beale is clearly the sort of man to avoid in the pub if one is feeling a little inconsistent around the edges. "If you take the view that people shouldn't be producing weaponry, then they shouldn't be producing it NOW. If it is a genuine principle, then it comes before other considerations, including income level."

A certain logic also pervades the letter from the Reverend Hugh Alexander, from Oakington: "There is a difference between hunting and the Hunt and, admirable as the sentiments of the League Against Cruel Sports may be, they are in full cry against the wrong quarry."

The Reverend Alexander takes a robust view of the countryside: "Hunting the fox has always gone on in the underworld of the countryside, and is quite ruthless and cruel." But being killed by the Hunt, where death is "almost instantaneous", is a much nicer way to die than from the "traps, snares, shooting and poison, which account for about 80 per cent of fox deaths." (Why either? But then I'm just a "squeamish townee".) "But where the Hunt prevails," continues Alexander in full cry, "the farmers join in, and are satisfied, the underworld is kept at bay, game-keepers ensure a favourable balance of nature, and all enjoy a maximum of sport with a minimum of cruelty."

Finally, to all you cheapskates out there, help is at hand. In our letters page last week, Councillor Nigel Todd asked the question that is on everybody's lips: why is Kevin Morgan's biography of Harry Pollitt retailing at £40? Strictly speaking, Bernhard Knight, from New Times Books, hasn't sent in the answer. But he has sent in the information that if you care to send half that amount (p & p included) to New Times Books, Freepost 6 Cynthia Street, London N1 9BR, then you will receive a copy of the said volume.

Vicky Hutchings

An errand boy's ire

I was surprised and disturbed to note that a magazine of the quality and standing of *NSS* has seen fit to publish a "plug" for the scurrilous pamphlet published by Mr Larry O'Hara (Letters, 20 August) in which he attacks, *inter alia*, *Searchlight* magazine and its editor, Gerry Gable, and myself.

One or two of the (just) readable allegations contained in this paranoid diatribe are seriously libellous. I stand accused by O'Hara of having criminal convictions for fraud and arson. For the record, this is a complete lie. If anyone worth more than his or her weekly giro is foolish enough to repeat, or in any way promote, this libel, I shall issue a writ with alacrity and gratitude. O'Hara, though, is safe. The fact that he requests payment for his illiterate ramblings in "blank postal orders or stamps" should indicate why this is the case.

It is not the purpose of this letter to defend my editor, Gerry Gable. He is more than capable of doing that for himself. However, the allegation by O'Hara that he is an agent for MI5 rivals anything ever produced for Monty Python. In recent years, Gerry has produced one of the most damning exposures ever of that organisation, was responsible for the breaking of the "Gladio" story in this country, and has exposed the link between MI6 and Italian terrorist exiles operating in Britain. Among others that O'Hara libels is Andrew Bell, co-author of my book *The Other Face of Terror*. Andrew recently played a major role in exposing Combat 18, the fascist terror group, on a *World in Action* documentary, and is a highly respected producer for that programme.

It is significant that O'Hara prefers to take the word of such luminaries of democracy and objectivity as Patrick Harrington and Steven John Brady (who really does have criminal convictions, including one for a quite serious act of violence), both of them dyed in the wool fascists, rather than the word of people opposed to fascism.

Your readers will no doubt form their own conclusions from the reality that this lunacy stems from the fact that I described O'Hara, in my *Searchlight* column, as "Patrick Harrington's errand boy". O'Hara duly complained to the Press Complaints Commission about this description. The Commission rejected his complaint and ruled that my comment was fully "justified". If O'Hara wishes to be taken seriously, I suggest that he starts attacking fascists rather than anti-fascists. He could begin with an analysis of the views of his informants and confidants, Harrington and Brady.

Finally, please accept my assurance that if you are good enough to publicly deny lies about me that have been circulated in O'Hara's pamphlet, I shall certainly *not* sue you for that denial!

Ray Hill
Searchlight
London W1

Debate is not enough

Simon Kyte's argument (Letters, 20 August), that in the interests of democracy it would be wrong to close down the British National Party headquarters in Welling, revolves around a democratic ideal which has no relation to the society we live in. It implies that the right to freedom of speech should be guaranteed to groups like the BNP, and that we should therefore confront them on the basis of rational argument, exposing fascism for what it is. Vague notions of democracy and reasoned debate are not, however, sufficient to stop racist attacks and murders.

Kyte is quite right to say that fascism should be exposed for the vulgar collection of lies it represents, but in the run-down areas where the Nazis prey, the comfortable ethics on the pages of *NSS* are far removed from the immediate problems of poverty and unemployment, to which racist scapegoating can seem a more tangible and compelling solution. This is reflected in the 210 per cent increase in racist attacks in south-east London in the last year.

The fight against fascism, then, has not only to dispel Nazi myths, but also to actively confront the Nazis themselves wherever they attempt to take hold, and prevent them peddling their propaganda, while at the same time offering a positive alternative to those who may be susceptible to their arguments.

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We should not seek to defend the right of people like the BNP to incite racial hatred and preach holocaust denials, but rather all those people who are disgusted by the BNP and its activities should be on the National Unity demonstration in Welling on 16 October to close down the BNP HQ, and set an example to anti-racists everywhere.

Tony Dabb
South Gosforth
Newcastle upon Tyne

Bonkers over taxes

Less than a year ago, *NSS* carried an article asking whether people could be expected to live on £42.45 a week (The benefits of Beveridge", 27 November), which was the scale of benefit payable to single adults who were unemployed. It appears that *NSS* is now quite happy with the answer, since according to your latest editorial ("Labour's economic problem", 20 August), a future Labour government should certainly not suggest that any extra cash should be raised from people living on much greater incomes in order to raise the miserable pittance paid to the unemployed to a rather better level. No extra taxes at all to be levied on the richer half of the population—that's the message to be conveyed by the Labour Party according to your present thinking. And in the light of this, you apparently expect the Labour Party to actually win an election? It is *NSS*, and its fellow modernisers, who are utterly bonkers. And what is more, I dare say that a great many people who have contributed to your Defence Fund—such as myself—are now seriously regretting it. Perhaps you'd like to send our money back?

A Wilcock
London W2

THIS ENGLAND

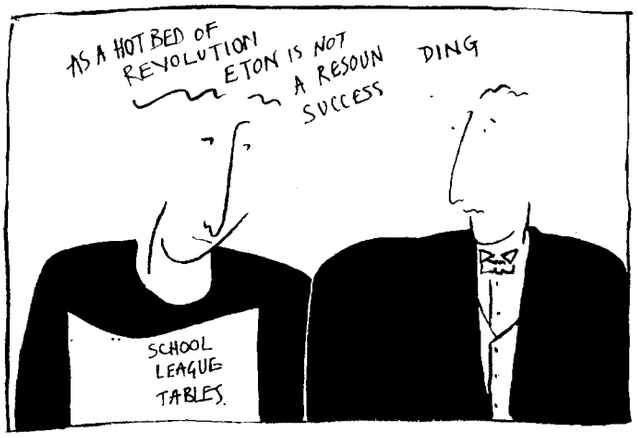
£5 for all entries printed below. Entries on a POSTCARD please

• Swimming Teachers required For both Children & Adults, ASA Qualified
Must be prepared to go in the water—Advertisement in the *Hendon Times* (Sigrid Rabiger)

• A gallery worker threw out the sculpture—made up of 34 jellies on plates—after spotting it near the exhibition centre's café.

Art student Ceri had spent weeks creating the work. She said: "I was horrified. I arrived to find just empty plates. The whole point was that the jellies should shrivel, change shape and go mouldy."

A spokeswoman for Birmingham's Midlands Art Centre said: "It was an understandable mistake."—*Sun* (Francis Harvey)



Fighting the green fight

I must respond to the suggestion made by Ann Bennett, Labour leader of Copeland Council, that there is some mystery about where Greenpeace gets its money for fighting Thorp ("Between a rock and a hard place", 13 August). All our money comes from public donations, and has been used sparingly but effectively on our Thorp campaign. British Nuclear Fuels' lobbying effort, visitor centre, and other public relations operations, dwarf the resources available to Greenpeace. We went to court because 58,000 people have asked for consideration of the wider questions surrounding Thorp, and the government has shown every sign of ignoring its legal obligation to hold an independent public inquiry.

Greenpeace opposes Thorp on environmental, waste management, proliferation and economic grounds, but the employment consequences for West Cumbria are a serious concern. It is a shame, therefore, that BNFL refused the request of the Environment Select Committe in 1986 that "BNFL and the Department of the Employment should prepare and publish a study of the alternative ways in which manpower involved in construction of Thorp could be re-employed on 'cleaning-up' work on the Sellafield site or on work elsewhere".

The trade unions have mounted a rearguard action to protect Thorp in an attempt to cling to jobs in an obsolete and declining industry. Sadly, they have done little to promote industrial regeneration based on clean technologies in the area. Greenpeace and others have commissioned studies on alternative employment in West Cumbria, but the unions have derided these rather than enter constructive debate.

Greenpeace is currently forming a partnership to commission a plan for alternative employment in the area based on clean technologies and the storage of spent nuclear fuel. We have invited the Sellafield unions, the TUC, the local councils and the Labour Party to take part. We would welcome the participation of any group concerned about matching the needs of the environment with local employment.

Clive Bates
Greenpeace
London N1

Alive and well at Eton

A number of interesting points arose from Boyd Tonkin's comments on Old Etonian authors (Print Out, 20 August). Self-effacing Old Etonians refer to their alma mater as Slough *Grammar*, not Slough Comprehensive. Slough has always had a selective education policy. As a former pupil of the real Slough Grammar school, I can think of several occasions where I have been mistaken for an Old Etonian when I innocently reveal where I was educated. It has been a constant annoyance to be a victim of this bizarre reverse snobbery.

It may be of consolation to left-wing readers that Eton's English masters—who must, presumably, play some part in their pupils' over-representation in the literary world—are almost entirely socialists. I once attended a talk given by one where he announced that Marxism was alive and well, and a good thing too.

Tom Morton
Slough
Berkshire

Incongruous support

Kate Hoey MP, the leader of the Labour Party lobbying group known as Democracy Now, has called for the dismissal of Labour's Northern Ireland spokesperson Kevin McNamara, following the publication of his *Oranges and Lemons* pamphlet, which attempts to make a case against the Labour Party setting up in Northern Ireland. The Council for Labour Representation, which is the umbrella body for the active Labour groupings in Northern Ireland, does not wish to be associated in any way with this attack on Mr McNamara.

In publishing his pamphlet, Mr McNamara has done little more than reiterate what is, after all, the long-standing Labour Party policy of not organising in Northern Ireland. However, unlike other previous Labour spokespersons and secretaries of state, Mr McNamara at least shows a serious and intelligent interest in Irish affairs, and knows whereof he speaks. *Oranges and Lemons* is a reasonably well-informed attempt to justify an unjustifiable policy.

Ms Hoey purports to be interested in establishing a democratic right of membership of a British political party for Northern Ireland residents. It is somewhat incongruous for somebody who is supposed to be promoting democracy to demand

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the dismissal of McNamara for enunciating the policy of the party he is appointed to serve. Not liking the message is hardly a good enough reason for shooting the messenger.

Regrettably, McNamara's otherwise somewhat weak and incoherent arguments against Labour organisation have been given some substance by the unwillingness of Democracy Now to distance itself from unionism, and by its failure to express positive and unequivocal support for Labour's policy of ending the partition of Ireland by consent. I wish to emphasise that Democracy Now has no present or past involvement in the Labour and socialist movements in Ireland, or in the recent Labour local election campaign in the north.

Pat Muldowney
Secretary, Council for Labour Representation
Derry
Northern Ireland

Freshman's lecture

As a fairly new subscriber to *NSS*, and an even newer member of the Labour Party, I am rather struck by the air of cynicism, even fatalism, that seems to afflict so many writings about the party.

Having recently read, for example, that it could take a year or more to process membership applications, I was surprised at how quickly mine went through. And after reading dismissive comments about the party newspaper (Shoreditch, 9 July), I was pleasantly impressed to find it readable, lively and slickly produced (if you're really looking for something dull and vacuous, try flicking through a copy of *Conservative Newsline* in your local library—it has all the wit and sparkle of a John Major speech). And as for the angst about Labour's declining membership, it is quite an achievement to have the membership it does, in view of the absurd £18 membership fee.

Does this matter? I think it does. Although it is probably a bit of cheek for such a recently joined member to start lecturing the party, I think Labour is in danger of letting this lack of confidence infect it, forcing us on to the defensive, and making us see the Tories as Supermen, holders of the hidden secret of electoral success. To quote G K Chesterton: "Men believe in the oddest things if they are in a series." Labour lost one election because it had been in power for 11 of the last 15 years and people were tired of it; they lost another with a disastrous programme against a leader whose popularity had been rescued from oblivion by a once-in-a-lifetime foreign war; they lost a third during a consumer boom. And they lost in 1992 with a fuzzy, ill-defined programme (can anyone now remember what platform Labour fought that election on, other than a vague promise to be nicer than the Tories?), against opponents who told a pack of lies.

Let's not be haunted by that series of reverses. We're not fighting political masterminds. We're fighting a set of clueless bumblers who make *Dad's Army* look like the SAS (and I speak as someone who was once a Conservative supporter in my naive youth). Only John Smith seems to have the assurance and self-belief that the Labour front bench needs—and for that he's branded as complacent. Mr Smith doesn't strike me as a movie buff, but I offer him and his party this quote from Kevin Costner at the end of *The Untouchables*, after the apparently untouchable Al Capone has been vanquished: "I just happened to be there when the wheel went round."

John Bourn
Gateshead
Tyne and Wear

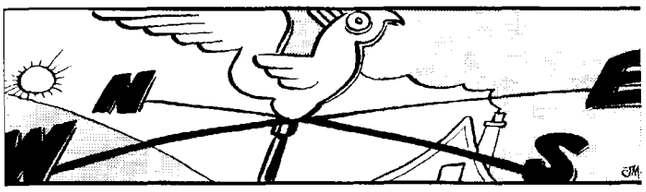
Reluctant man of letters

I am avoiding the temptation to bang on about your description of me (Influences, 20 August) as a "letter writer", which I strongly suspect is meant to be demeaning. But for the record, I remain: president of Haringey Trades Council; secretary of the Society of Telecom Executives, London HQ branch; research student, London University Institute of Education, etc etc . . .

And incidentally, if Nyta Mann (Letters, 20 August) thinks that publishing an Influences column about me will stop me from writing letters, she knows nothing about how dialectical materialism works.

Keith Flett
London N17

FRINGE BENEFITS



Colin Ward is glimpsed on German TV under false pretences

I was sitting under an awning outside a café opposite the cathedral and ducal palace in Urbino, drinking coffee and mineral water like everyone else around me and thinking about the nuances of the lecture I was to give up the street in the *Magistero*, a venerable building exquisitely transformed with no change to its external appearance.

"May we join you?" asked a voice in Italian. "Please do," I replied. My new friends turned out to be a German violinist and a Japanese harp-player, members of the Stuttgart Orchestra, performing at a music festival at Pesaro, who, after a gruelling day of rehearsal under Neville Marriner, had been released for a trip to this beautiful hill town.

I love musical gossip and was intrigued to hear of the reverence they had for their former conductor Sergiu Celibidache, who, they told me, had taught them everything they needed to know about orchestral performance. They, in turn, as they had been bashing away at the Mendelssohn violin concerto, were intrigued to meet someone who claimed to have heard it as a child with legendary soloists like Kreisler, Szigeti and the young Menuhin, as well as now forgotten ones like Jelli d'Arányi or Albert Sammons.

Happily we were agreed that the adulation of star soloists was misplaced, and that there was something absurd about the sheer *size* of their orchestra. It has 120 players, of whom 80 had travelled to Pesaro. We moved on to discuss the other works they had been rehearsing: Stravinsky's *Jeu de Cartes* and Ravel's *La Valse*. But just as we were getting round to the idea that the most rewarding sounds came from small groups, and, within the western European tradition, chamber music, and after yet more coffee and mineral water, the violinist nudged me.

"Do you mind going on talking, but about Italy?" he whispered. And looking up I found that the camera of German television was focused on us, filming the visiting musicians fraternising with the natives.

So, out of profound ignorance, I pontificated about the current chaos of Italian politics and the significance of new movements like the Northern Leagues and the Network (*La Rete*), and their meaning for a Europe of the regions. And then about my impression of the newly elected mayor of this ancient town, Massimo Galuzzi of the Left Democrats, the former Communist Party.

To my dismay, I could see that the camera and the boom microphone were still around. So I gave up and admitted why I was there. It was to speak at the 18th "International Laboratory of Architecture and Urban Design" set up by the self-effacing architect of renovation and renewal in Urbino, Giancarlo De Carlo.

Every year, he and his worldwide team of teachers and students present the citizens with the result of a month-long analysis of one of their problems: the closure of the railway, the decline of local agriculture faced by international competition, or, this year, the task of finding a new use for the now derelict brickworks, *La Fornace*, which made the lovely bricks from which the town was built.

By now the camera crew had moved off, and we turned to the global culture in which the citizens and visitors alike now live, and what we felt about the sounds the musicians and I actually heard in the cafés and streets. One was a dreary Italian version of Rap with synthesized accompaniment. Another was more sympathetic: the spread across Europe of Klesmer music from the long-dead Jewish Lower East Side of New York. The Stuttgart players shrugged their shoulders. That night the Piazza della Repubblica was filled with amplified *musak*.

Next morning, Giancarlo went to see Mr Galuzzi to protest. "Nothing I can do," he said. "It's been hired for the season. It's what the visitors want."

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Britain's museums are striving to make themselves more relevant to a fantastic variety of national and local cultures. **Gaynor Kavanagh** sums up the state of play

Exhibitionist tendencies

Put the word "museum" into your head and what do you come up with? Most probably, the images you may find there will say as much about who you are and the memories of your last visit (however long ago that was), as about what museums in general are today or might be tomorrow. The point is that museums, like ourselves, are fantastically varied and what may be true for one museum or one visitor is by no means true for all.

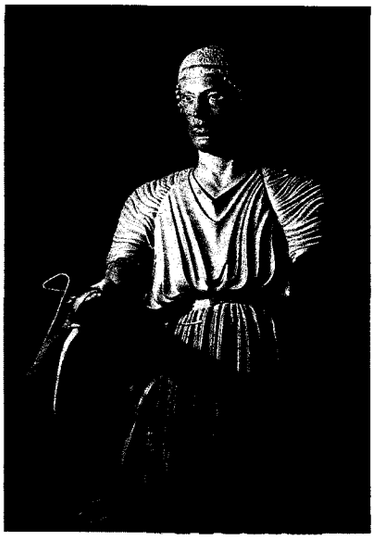
Of course, there is much common ground: how can it be otherwise? Museums are not neutral places, nor are they without politics. They house the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves and hence are in a constant state of revision. Museums are controlled spaces and are as saturated with the ideologies of our times as are books, drama and journals. And just like authors, critics and editors, museum professionals carry with them and operate through whatever cultural baggage is theirs, within a system that has fundamental political requirements. Of equal importance, museum visitors are not neutral either. We bring with us our life experiences, attitudes and interests. Once in the museum, we set our own programmes, provide a great deal of our own interpretation and choose whatever messages we are willing to accept. It does not matter what our educational level is, if we find something to be boring or not relevant, we will walk away and forget it. And what I find boring and not relevant will be angels singing to someone else.

Museums work in subtle and complex ways, and—frankly—some work better than others. A mind-shatteringly innovative exhibition that opens up a subject in a way that no one has tried before is as nothing if your four-year-old desperately wants a pee, your father cannot negotiate the stairs, or the labels are not in your first language. Similarly, what is the point in having the best services for visitors, if the exhibitions are dull beyond belief and deliberately exclusive? The memories we choose to hold of museums are often built of such details. We remember the shapes and sizes of things, the colours and the juxtapositions. We remember how and whether the visit was shared and its difficulties and pleasures. But more than this, we remember our feelings, both good and bad.

The 2,500 museums in the UK can be anything they are allowed to be. Even museum professionals have rather different attitudes towards them. A substantial proportion still hold to a fundamentalist view of museums as keeping places for objects, where scholarship is central to all activities and the visitor is just an incidental feature. Many would now move far beyond this. While not denying the collection-centred nature of museums nor the necessity for original research, they would want to articulate a clear purpose for the "keeping" and would see this as lying within cultural empowerment. Museums should be places where people can look, think and feel, where they can be partners with the museum and not on the periphery of its affairs. Access, participation, representation, dialogue, focus have become key words. If you have not come across this, I suspect it is because you have not visited museums, especially social history ones, in places like Hull, Glasgow, Manchester, the Isle of Man, Walsall, Newcastle, Kings Lynn, Okehampton or Birmingham lately. Nor may you have come across information about museum developments such as those taking place right now in Croydon and Oxfordshire.

The fact that museums in Britain receive as many as 73 million visits per year suggests they are currently successful, if only in terms of numbers. The profiles we have of museum visitors indicate that the social range of visitors is much wider than for most other forms of cultural or arts provision. The more detailed figures indicate that the profile of visitors to art galleries differs from those going to social history museums, and the profiles of visitors to costume museums is different from those going to transport museums. Now that people more often than not have to pay their money, they take their choices, and make very deliberate ones at that. It is also appreciated that many people choose not to go to museums. The reasons here may be economic—the cost of a visit can be high, especially when transport and refreshment expenses are added to the admissions charges. But the reasons may be more personal—people believe, often rightly, that museums are not catering for their needs and interests. Non-visitors tend to be people on low incomes without transport, and people whose history and culture have, for whatever reason, been excluded from museum collections and exhibitions.

The quality of museum provision at present rests upon many things, including negotiating a difficult path through the different agendas of those who fund museums. It also depends



Sir Peter Brooke: National Heritage Secretary
Favourite object: "The Charioteer"
Location: Museum at Delphi, Greece
Reason for choice: Invidious to choose an object here. Otherwise, sentiment as much as quality. Sentiment in that a copy belonged to the late Oscar Stonorov, a considerable American friend. But a unique (earthquake) survival, the only single bronze early 5th-century BC life-size victory figure. And Delphi is numinous for politicians . . .

Elspeth King: Director, Dunfermline Heritage Centre
Favourite object: The 17th-century box bed of the Scottish Covenantor Donald Cargill.
Location: Lady Greenhill's House, one of five museums owned and operated by Biggar Museum Trust in Biggar, Lanarkshire.
Reasons for choice: For me, the rescue, acquisition, conservation, display and interpretation of this object exemplify good curatorship, and demonstrate how, at a local level, national history can be brought to life. I am a connoisseur of museum curatorship, a profession which is fast being marginalised by marketing managers and adminstrators. It is the curators who make the museums work, and Biggar is now firmly on the visitor map of Scotland thanks to its clever curator.

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upon museums being prepared to learn from and communicate more directly with museum audiences. Fundamental, too, is the need for museums not to be deflected from their essential brief: the questioning of cultural and natural environments—past and present—through material and oral evidence. The interests museums serve are not always compatible, and the politics of it all can be treacherous. Working toward museum provision that has at its centre the visitor as an active participant, when the political climate would have us as little more than passive spectators and consumers, is beset with difficulties.

So, the changes taking place in museums are springing from debate and from experiment. Museums are getting to know more about their audiences and what they make of museums. It is no longer good enough to assume that the visiting public is a homogeneous lump of folk: we are not. Nor are we a walking mass of stereotypes.

Those involved with developing a museum service in Croydon were well aware of this. In particular, Sally MacDonald, the museum's development officer, was interested in the ideas, feelings, opinions and beliefs of the people who might use the service.

To take just one small fragment of this work, the Croydon research pointed to definitions of an ideal museum. The people questioned wanted to find in museums a sense of change, opportunities for active participation, and a sense of connectedness between the past and the present. They wanted all their senses to be involved, to relate ordinary things to extraordinary ones, and to have the opportunity to try out and perhaps learn new skills. But the degree to which these were requirements varied according to the individual speaking, whether they were regular museum-goers or not, whether young or old. A teenager was enthusiastic about interactive displays. "There was a Roman Museum up London where they ask questions on the screen. There was about five of us and we stayed for half an hour answering questions." Regular museum-goers seemed more comfortable with less interactive activities. One expressed the view that "workshops are facilities for the poor. You associate them with left-wing councils like Lewisham and Camden. They're for people who haven't really been able to do anything."

How can museums provide an ideal inclusive service without barriers and discrimina-

Ann Clwyd MP: Shadow Heritage Secretary
Favourite object: Model of the Cadfan Stone, Tywyn, Merioneth.
Location: National Museum of Wales, Cardiff. The original is in the churchyard of Tywyn church.
Reasons for choice: The words carved on the Cadfan stone are the earliest examples of written Welsh, dating back to the year 700AD. That a language spoken by half a million people in Wales today has survived for so many generations is a constant wonder, even for those who have the good fortune to speak it, like myself.

Kirsty Milne encounters pride and madness at Soho's new museum

Soho on show

Marx, Mozart and Casanova—all one-time residents of Soho—must be carousing in heaven. If the efforts of modern Sohoites are successful, their old stamping ground will soon be dignified by its first museum.

"Loopy idea really," concedes Bryan Burrough, chairman of the Soho Society, marvelling at how ambitious the plans have become. Over the next four years, the aspiring Museum of Soho aims to raise £1.75 million to start a small museum in the newly renovated church of St Anne, at the bottom of Wardour Street.

The museum dream was an offshoot of a wider community revival. In 1972, angry at plans to knock down 18th-century buildings and build office blocks, Burrough and other residents founded the Soho Society. They learned to scrutinise planning applications, fought to regulate the sex industry, and tried to find housing for Soho residents who were being squeezed out of the area.

The Society's grand enterprise was the rebuilding of St Anne's, a Wren church bombed almost to destruction in 1940, with only the tower left standing. The renovation took years, delayed by hitches in construction and shortages of cash. But when the new building finally opened in 1991, it incorporated flats, a community centre, a chapel and an office for the Soho Society. The architect, Jan Piet, left space around the lift shaft. "He just wrote on the plans 'exhibition room'," says Burrough, "and from that the idea grew."

Soho has never had a museum, but supporters argue that its rich history deserves one. "Everyone who was anyone lived here," says Burrough, citing the artist William Hogarth, the novelist Fanny Burney, the poets Blake and Shelley. Socially, Soho was a hive of artisans, and a cultural melting pot for waves of immigrants: Huguenots, Italians, Jews, Chinese and Bengalis.

Burrough got together a museum committee, whose members decided they did not want visitors traipsing round a conventional chronological exhibition. They preferred the idea of treating Soho's history thematically, looking at topics like eating and drinking; health and sickness; the sex industry; famous Sohoites; religion. Beyond that, no one on the committee had a clear idea of how the museum would look.

The committee chair, Wendy Monkhouse, sent members out on a fact-finding mission. Each was to visit, incognito, one of London's small museums and report back to the committee. But the big inspiration came not from London but from Hull. The Old Grammar School Museum, which opened in 1990, looks at the city's history thematically, on a human timescale running from childhood to old age. Set up by Elizabeth Frostick, who was then Hull's keeper of social history, the museum impressed the Sohoites with its imaginative use of ordinary objects, such as ration books, and its child-friendly displays.

Inside St Anne's, which visitors will approach through an entrance on Shaftesbury Avenue, Burrough shows off some of the objects that are being logged or "accessioned" as part of the collection. There are horsehair milk bottle-washers from the Oxford Express Dairy in Frith Street, started by a Welsh family in in the 1920s. There are silver school medals won by little girls called Ada and Florence, pupils at the parish school in Dean Street around the turn of the century. "One year's perfect attendance," runs the approving inscription. "Never absent, never late." There are photos of the Blitz, taken by a local clockmaker who went out on the street with his camera "literally as the dust was settling", according to Burrough. The museum is continuing its "artefact drive" and was recently rewarded with a more up-to-date exhibit: silverware from Greek Street's famous L'Escargot restaurant, forced into receivership by the recession earlier this year.

Despite the Sohoites' excitement, their baby museum is starting out in a cold climate. The government's advisory body, the Museums and Galleries Commission, warns that 2,500 museums "is probably too many. We need fewer and better, not more." The MGC goes on: "Anyone contemplating starting a museum must seek advice beforehand, and consider the annual running costs once the capital cost has been met and the initial enthusiasm of those responsible has perhaps waned."

Stephen Faber, from the Association of Independent Museums, shares the MGC's pessimism. "After the Thatcher boom years, small museums have found it very tough going in this recession, and some have had to close."

But the Sohoites are confident that their museum can be self-financing. As well as attracting private endowments and company sponsorship, they hope to qualify for the MGC's registration scheme, which allows museums meeting certain standards to apply for government grants. They have also, after long debate, followed the tide of the 1980s by deciding to charge for entry.

Stephen Faber knows from experience that museums inspire a missionary enthusiasm which no amount of prudence can extinguish. "If anyone started out with a business plan, they wouldn't do it, they'd give up at once," he says. "You need that element of madness."

The Museum of Soho can be contacted at 55 Dean Street, London, W1V 5HH, or on 071 734 2922

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MARX MEMORIAL LIBRARY APPEAL
60th Anniversary 1993

In 1933 the Marx Memorial Library and Workers' School was founded by a committee from all sections of the British Labour Movement to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the death of Karl Marx. It was an immediate response to the "burning of the books" in Germany by the Nazis in their attempt to stamp out marxist and all progressive ideas.

After 60 years the need to preserve and develop Marxist and radical thought remains crucial. No one can deny the immense contribution to the history of ideas made by socialist and radical thinkers whose writings have been preserved in the Library. They continue to be studied by successive generations of working people, students and researchers from all over the world.

The Marx Memorial Library is unique in its collections of rare and historic socialist and radical periodicals and pamphlets, 20,000 in all, including publications of the Social Democratic Federation, the co-operative movement, the National Unemployed Workers' Movement, the feminist and peace movements, and the Labour and Communist Parties.

No public funding of any kind is made to the library and your help is urgently needed to maintain and develop this unique institution which has so much to offer to the radical and progressive movement.

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tion, if audiences are so varied, with needs and perceptions so at odds with one another? The answer is that no museum can be ideal, but it can define its target audiences and work with them to provide a higher standard of service. Museums have to provide layers of services and variety in exhibitions, and there are various ways in which this is being tried.

Our understanding is that people learn best when they can start with what they know and move on to new areas. Essentially, museums work when they speak directly to our life experiences and provide genuine opportunities for exploration.

The most recent example was the *Take Heart* exhibition at Birmingham City Museum and Art Gallery. This was a temporary exhibition that built a biography of an area of the city and the people who live there. It embraced a wide range of personal memories and profiles, past and present, and raised questions about the continuities and discontinuities of life in the Heartlands area of Birmingham. It did not seek to highlight separate cultural groups but the commonality and diversity of experience, for example in relation to schooling and housing. *Take Heart* made you think, feel and look around. In a city where only 30 per cent of the population use the museum, the exhibition demonstrated that this figure would be much higher if the interests of local people were recognised and catered for more directly. A Museum of Birmingham has to be eagerly awaited.

Other museums are using this holistic approach to the histories and life experiences of local people. As well as greater consultation and fieldwork, it is bringing about the breaking down of the discipline barriers to be found in museums. Categories such as fine art, decorative art, archaeology, technology, suit the cataloguer and the specialist, but work against innovation and new questions. They also work against the discovery of an interconnected material world. The Art of Tyneside exhibition at the Laing Art Gallery and the new Museum of Religion in Glasgow are both, in museum terms, "multi-disciplinary" and have demonstrated that museums need not be confined to established formats. They have demonstrated that museums can be active forums of debate. Whether you like these exhibitions or not, most people have an opinion. Moreover, they beg the question of more traditional types of museums—who runs them: objects or people, order or ideas? By making connections and asking new questions about such subjects as art, religion, death, power or profit, museums can open themselves up to new possibilities and, hopefully, new audiences.

Museums are no longer the places they once were, and the changes should be noted. Through trial and error, experiment and debate, much better ways are being sought and found to make our histories and cultures open to us all. However, no one would deny that there is still a long way to go before museums and all they contain will be equally available to all.

Gaynor Kavanagh is a lecturer in the Department of Museum Studies at the University of Leicester

Elizabeth Esteve-Coll: Director, Victoria and Albert Museum

Favourite object: One of my favourite objects is a small medieval sculpture depicting the Madonna and Child, which is part of a capital depicting the Flight into Egypt.

Location: The last time I saw this piece, it was displayed in the chapter house of the cathedral of St Lazare at Autun in Burgundy.

Reasons for choice: I first saw the piece when I was a mature student studying medieval French sculpture at Birkbeck College, part of the University of London.

This particular sculpture has remained a favourite of mine, not only because it is a moving and powerful image, but also because of its happy associations with Birkbeck and the summer holidays that I spent wandering round village churches in France.

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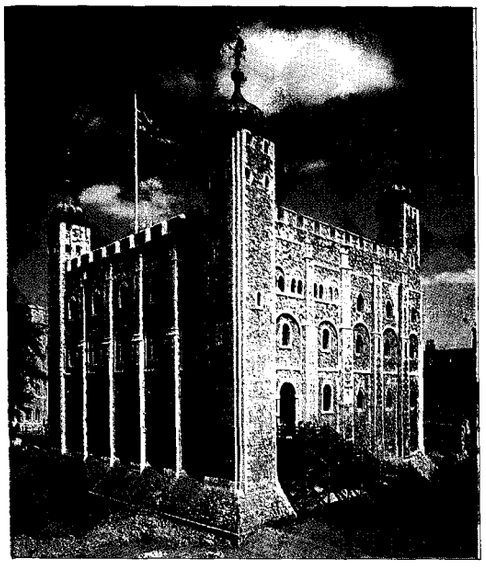

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If you're a deceased literary figure, you can have your housekeeping done for nothing by the National Trust. **Kirsty Milne** met two long-suffering Trust administrators

Dead poets' society

The house where Wordsworth was born is inhabited by a heretic. "I like some of his poetry, but he went off a bit," says Yvonne Osborne, who runs the poet's birthplace on behalf of the National Trust. "And I think he may have been quite an unpleasant man."

Yet her home for the last two years has been the place where Wordsworth spent his childhood, a solid Georgian house in the Cumbrian town of Cockermouth, sacred to fans of Romantic poetry and lovers of the Lakes. The River Derwent flows past the terrace at the bottom of the garden, just as Wordsworth described it in Book I of *The Prelude*. The plants Dorothy Wordsworth remembered in her journals still flourish in the flowerbeds, and the house is furnished much as it would have been when she and William were children in the 1770s.

But the present lady of the house could not be more unlike Wordsworth's mother, Ann, a draper's daughter from nearby Penrith. Yvonne Osborne has spent most of her life abroad, returning from the sands of Dubai and the cedars of Lebanon to the capricious shocks of Cumbrian weather. She is elegant in a style only an expatriate would essay, wearing trousers of palest suede in a house where parts of the ceiling frequently threaten to collapse into clouds of plaster-dust.

At her National Trust interview, the question that exercised her prospective employers was "whether I would be able to unblock the lavatories if there was no one else to do it". Their fears were unfounded. However glamorous, Yvonne Osborne is a practical person. With her Foreign Office husband, she weathered the Russian invasion of Afghanistan (from Kabul) and the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait (from Baghdad). She was working for the British embassy when Farzad Bazoft was executed, and later helped compile a database of hostages taken by Saddam Hussein. The Osbornes left on the last US flight before the bombing of Baghdad began.

After two such postings, they sought a quieter life in the Lake District. But while Cockermouth may be less dramatic than Baghdad, Yvonne Osborne still finds herself on duty 24 hours a day. "People ring up at night to say 'Can I bring a party tomorrow?' They'll even ring up on Christmas Day." She has to keep a vigilant eye on the condition of the house, calling in National Trust conservation specialists where necessary. There are daily irritations—not least an assembly of jackdaws whose droppings streak the windows and obscure the garden view.

Then there are the visitors, 22,000 of them crammed into seven months (the house is closed in winter). With the help of her steward, a Wordsworth specialist, Mrs Osborne must try to answer every imaginable question about the poet and his birthplace—plus supplementaries, such as whether Cockermouth and the cocker spaniel are related. "It gets very frazzling," she says. "By August, you can come close to bopping someone."

As in all National Trust houses, volunteers help with informal security. "The problem is not so much people touching things as people taking things," says Mrs Osborne. She has lost count of how many dear old ladies have had to be restrained from plumping themselves down on chairs which belonged to Wordsworth's friend, the poet Robert Southey.

At her interview, the question was whether she could unblock the lavatories if there was no one else to do it

While she can relay detailed information about Dorothy's candlesticks or William's bookcase ("I'm a quick study"), Osborne does not present herself as the keeper of a shrine. Her passion is for objects: the detail on a cornice, the story of a picture. It is not Wordsworth but the house that she loves.

Not so Diane Uttley, custodian of Shaw's Corner in Hertfordshire, where Shaw lived from 1906 until his death in 1950. Uttley has always had, in her words,"a passion for GBS". When she was invited to apply for the

Places of pilgrimage: Shaw's Corner (left) and Wordsworth's house (centre). Yvonne Osborne (right) keeps the latter in running order

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job at Shaw's Corner, "It was like a dream come true." Yet the house itself, a red-brick rectory, is nothing to write home about. Uttley relates how Shaw and his wife, Charlotte, stood at the gates and agreed how ugly it was. "It was the first time they had agreed on anything."

Shaw wanted a retreat, a place to work in peace. What he liked about the village of Ayot St Lawrence was its total isolation. With satisfaction, he wrote: "The last thing of real importance that happened was, perhaps, the Flood." Lurching down the narrow lanes on an impossibly high bicycle, he sometimes returned to Charlotte with blood pouring down his face. (For longer distances, Shaw relied on the gardener to chauffeur him in a chocolate-coloured Rolls.)

Diane Uttley and her husband come from Leeds. But such was her enthusiasm for Shaw and Shaw's Corner that she and her husband clocked up more than 2,000 miles' worth of visits. When, in 1989, she was offered the custodian's post, they left friends, family, and well-paid jobs in industry to move south. But Uttley loves her changed life. "Wouldn't you have done it?" she asks, sitting on the terrace overlooking lavender-bordered lawns in the garden that Shaw designed. "Look at it here—so peaceful and calm."

The contents of the modest house have been reverently preserved. "Everything is as it was," Diane Uttley explains. Shaw's hats hang on the hatstand. His galoshes are laid out by the front door. In his study, a sheet of headed paper stands ready in the Remington typewriter. Even the accident-prone bicycle stands unsteadily in the kitchen passage.

Nevertheless, Uttley hates the term "museum". When some Americans sent plastic bags to be filled with Shaw's Corner dust, she could not rise to the occasion. "It's still a home," she says. Cooking smells drift over from the custodian's half of the house, where she and her husband enjoy the contemporary luxury of central heating. Their Siamese cats pose on the lawn for visitors, or curl up on the stairs and get mistaken for ceramics.

She dismisses Shaw's image as an acerbic eccentric: "I don't think he was difficult. It was all an act"

Uttley says she could not do the job if she did not have strong feelings for Shaw. "I agree with a lot of his principles. He was a humanist, I'm a humanist." The image of an acerbic eccentric is one she dismisses. "I don't think he was particularly difficult. It was all an act." She even has kind words for Charlotte, whose growing mysticism led Virginia Woolf to dismiss her rudely as "a fat white Persian cat".

Uttley does not shrink from a little posthumous PR work. "I feel I have to stand up for GBS. I do feel protective of him." She has spoken out in the dispute over Shaw's will. She has helped Michael Holroyd with research for his mammoth biography. And she is raising funds to replace a bronze garden statue of St Joan, which was destroyed by vandals in 1968.

In Cockermouth, Yvonne Osborne has also found the custodian's job propelling her into the limelight. Older residents dislike the colour of the house, an authentic but startling sunset pink; they remember it from its prewar, pre-Trust days as a black-and-white doctor's surgery. More seriously, a storm on a national scale blew up when the owners of the Trout Hotel, next door to the house, proposed building an extension that would block the view across the Derwent. Surprisingly, since the Wordsworth connection brings Cockermouth visitors and cash, the local council agreed. The Trust fought back, with indignant letters to the *Times* signed by, among others, Antonia Fraser and Ted Hughes. The planning application was called in by the Environment Secretary, Michael Heseltine.

But all the indignation and activity came to nothing. In December, the planning permission was allowed to stand—though the extension is yet to be built. Looking back on the furore, what infuriates Yvonne Osborne is the authorities' lack of interest in the consequences of their decision. "No one from the Department of the Environment or the local council came to see for themselves whether the view would be damaged. If they'd asked to come, I would have known about it."

The demands on the National Trust's 200-odd administrators are intensifying. According to Martin Drury, deputy director-general: "They are tremendously in the front line, dealing with the public all the time. Gone are the days when someone could say 'I want a quiet job while I get on with writing my book'." The Trust usually employs people looking for a second career: ex-teachers, ex-policemen—even an ex-Assam tea planter. Pay ranges from £10,000 to £15,000—with, naturally, free accommodation thrown in. Back-up is provided by the Trust's 16 regional offices, but isolation can be a problem. "We choose them for their independence," says Drury. "They have to be people who are prepared to work on their own and enjoy it."

Diane Uttley says she has no time to feel lonely. On the contrary, she is glad the house is closed three days a week, giving her a break from the 15,000 visitors a year. "I'm continually meeting people from all over the world. You never know who's going to walk through the front door."

Trying to define her job, part housekeeper, part posthumous press attaché, she remarks, "It's rather like being married, really."

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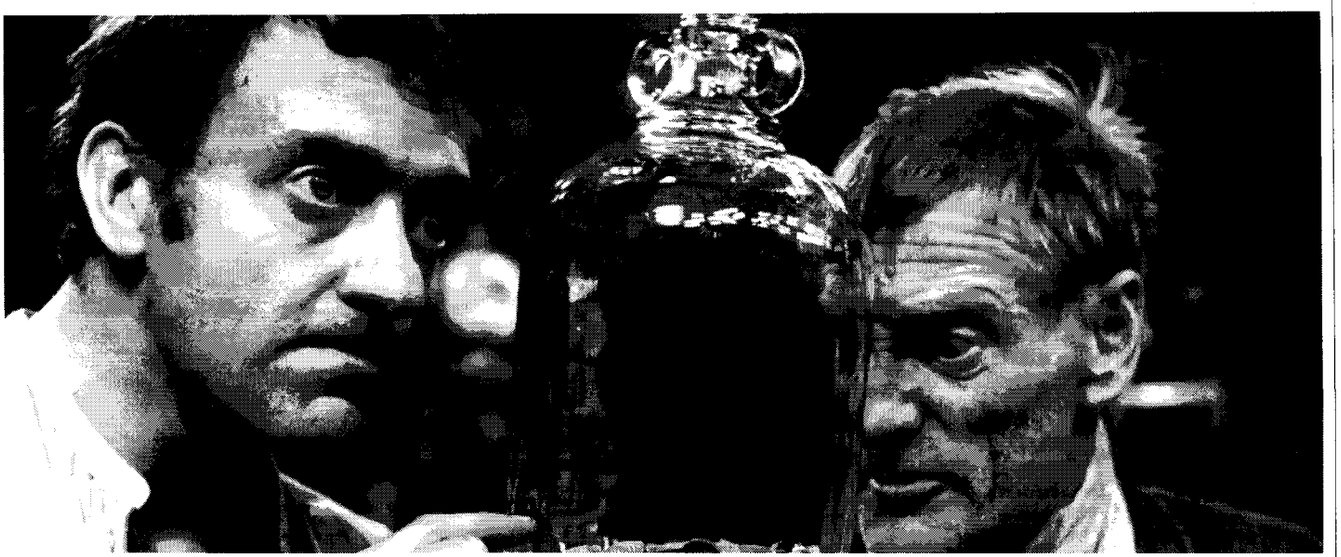

Paradise lost? Wilfred Brambell and Harry H Corbett in "Steptoe and Son"

John Birt's BBC strategy means more choice for the chattering classes and less for the chuckling masses. **Steven Barnett** asks if the BBC can recover its popular touch

Are you being superserved?

Is the BBC becoming too solemn for its own good? Even John Reith, a man of deeply serious intent, was wise enough to recognise that to educate and inform people you also need to amuse them.

The Reithian "mission statement" was handed down the BBC for generations, ensuring that, by the 1960s and 1970s, the BBC was giving us some of television's most memorable entertainment. Morecambe and Wise were not just Christmas Day fare, but essential viewing for millions every week. *The Likely Lads*, *Porridge*, *Dad's Army*, *The Good Life*, *The Two Ronnies*—all were BBC products that made the nation laugh and have stood the test of time (as the current summer schedules of repeats testify).

But these programmes did more than just make us laugh; they legitimised the BBC. By providing popular mass entertainment, the Corporation made everyone feel that the BBC was part of their lives and that the licence fee was decent value. Compulsory taxes are never willingly paid. But they are begrudged less when the rewards are visible, substantial and frequent.

By cementing the BBC's relationship with viewers, these programmes also enhanced the BBC's reputation with politicians. In a time of rising inflation and concern about costs, it gave BBC managers tremendous leverage when negotiating for a higher licence fee. Governments will always feel more vulnerable when demanding cuts from organisations held in high public esteem, but if they think voters will simply shrug and thank them for money saved, the BBC becomes an easy cost-cutting target.

That is the BBC's current dilemma. It is not just that BBC1, the engine room of mass-appeal programming, has seen some of its lowest weekly audience shares on record—hovering around 30 per cent for much of the summer, where previously it has been accustomed to well over a third. The disappointing performance of recent mass entertainment initiatives suggests that the BBC may have lost its popular touch. The very public failure of *Eldorado* has been followed by flops such as *A Year in Provence* and *Strathblair*, without the successes to match.

There is nothing wrong with failure. There have been bad, sometimes crushingly awful, programmes made before (some of which resurfaced in last year's BBC2 celebration of television turkeys, *TV Hell*). The right to fail has been a vital part of Britain's television culture. But the failures have always been overshadowed by the Steptoes and the Porridges. You need the hits to justify the misses.

The fear expressed outside the BBC is that this is more than just a bad patch; that it's symptomatic of a significant shift in emphasis and resources away from the light towards the heavy. Is this an inevitable side-effect of the Birtian revolution?

Chief among the protagonists for this view is Bill Cotton, the man who ran light entertainment for ten years before becoming controller of BBC1 and managing director (television). Cotton believes that, under John Birt and his chairman Duke Hussey, the BBC has been diverted into journalism. He points to the board of management position of Tony Hall, director of news and current affairs, and says: "I don't see the director of drama—which is the heartbeat of the place—on the board." Finance for news, he says, is "throttling money for other programmes".

At the very least, there is a sense of confusion about the BBC's direction. Birt's elevation to director-general was accompanied by speculation that the BBC would move upmarket, concentrating on so-called "quality" programmes, while leaving the high-rating stuff to the commercial sector. Birtism became synonymous with elitism, although in that sense, Birt was probably never a Birtist. He did talk a great deal about distinctiveness: the BBC would make programmes across the board, as long as they were somehow different and of high quality.

Then, earlier this month, the BBC bought *This is Your Life* from ITV. No one explained how it's a distinctive contribution to popular culture, but the message is clear: the BBC is back in the market for guaranteed light-entertainment success, even if it has to nick it from someone else. The new philosophy was reinforced last month by a briefing from Liz Forgan, the head of network radio, and Alan Yentob, controller of BBC1, in which they spoke explicitly about the dangers of "superserving the ABC1s". Then David Liddiment, the man responsible for *You've Been Framed*, was poached from Granada to replace Jim Moir as head of entertainment. And the new head of drama, Charles Denton, has made it clear that he is committed to peak-time popular successes—possibly even another soap opera.

The risk is that this change of direction may have come too late to avoid damaging consequences. Whatever the current policy, there was no doubting the messages transmitted in the early days of the Checkland/Birt regime. News bureaux were opened in Europe and

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specialist reporters drafted in to the expanded news and current affairs directorate, while talented staff in light entertainment became demoralised. There was no indication the new managers thought entertainment mattered.

But is the talent still there? Is it possible, after such neglect, to reinvigorate the staff who must come up with those original and popular formats to keep the BBC close to our hearts? Their task of attracting and fostering talent is made more difficult by a growing "contract culture". What were once secure staff jobs are being turned into short-term contracts of one or two years, sometimes even six months. How creative can people be when they have one eye on the jobs pages? Meanwhile, more work is being commissioned from the independent sector, which can never provide the sense of corporate security that allows ideas to thrive.

As if things weren't bad enough, there is also a school of thought that says the days of television's popular blockbusters may be over: that the great shows of the 1960s and 1970s starred performers who had sharpened their wits on the pre-TV stages of radio, theatre and music hall, and that television enabled them to capitalise on their show-business skills for mass audiences. There is no equivalent platform for new stars, except the alternative comedy scene that gives us the more rarefied humour of *Have I Got News For You* and *Whose Line Is It Anyway?* This is television's problem, not just the BBC's, but it should not be exaggerated. Soap opera audiences still exceed ten million. So can popular entertainment shows.

It is fashionable to knock the current regime at the BBC, and John Birt does not help his cause by a management style that owes more to Coopers & Lybrand than to any obvious sense of delight in the BBC's reputation. Not everything pre-Birt was rosy, and the investment in journalism has paid some much acclaimed dividends.

But one of the essential features of the old BBC was an uncanny ability to have its finger on the popular pulse. It was firmly part of the mainstream, confident in its judgments. If it has lost this touch, the consequences are more than just an impoverished popular culture. An organisation that relies on a universal flat-rate tax for its income, but which cannot demonstrate an ability to please large numbers, will soon lose political support. A new report from accountant Touche Ross considers the option of a lower BBC licence fee. If pressure to reduce it mounts, a failing entertainment sector would be the prime candidate for cuts.

For years—and never more than in the 1980s—there have been opponents from left and right who dearly wanted an end to the licence fee. No other form of funding would guarantee an independent and vibrant organisation. But its survival depends on regenerating the BBC's popular touch. There may not be much time left to recapture it.

Steven Barnett is co-author of "The Battle for the BBC", to be published by Aurum Press. On Monday (30 August), BBC2 raids the archives to present "One Day in the 1960s"

Shakespeare meets the magnificent seven: Denzel Washington and friends

Jonathan Romney joins Will and Ken's excellent adventure

Much Ado? Carry On!

With all due respect to Orson Welles, the most remarkable film adaptation of Shakespeare I ever saw was a *Hamlet* by the lugubrious Finnish absurdist Aki Kaurismaki. In it, the sweet prince plotted a takeover of his dead father's rubber duck factory, killed Laertes by jamming a radio over his head, and spurned Ophelia because she was too fat. Next to that, even Zeffirelli's all-action *Hamlet* with Mel Gibson—"Just when you thought it was safe to come out from behind the arras"—would look a bit pale.

The first few scenes of Kenneth Branagh's *Much Ado About Nothing* (on general release from 27 August) almost score for comparable absurdity—simply because it overdoses on puppyish gusto. We begin with jolly Richard Briers and the fair folk of Messina lounging around their garden, enjoying a spectacular view of what is actually Tuscany, and swaying along contentedly as Emma Thompson's Beatrice gives them a tune from up a tree.

It's announced that Don Pedro (Denzel Washington) and his men are on the way, and looka yonder, there they are, galloping up in clouds of slow-motion like the Magnificent Seven. It's the cue for the film to change register from pastoral-comical to hysterical-athletical, as the womenfolk run giggling to change into their best frillies, while the visiting rugby team start executing somersaults and frenzied back-slaps in the shower room—suddenly it's more like *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers*. A brisk round of wobbling bums and snapping stays, and it's back to courtly decorum and a bit of a bergamasque.

The constant, bustling change of pace is possibly a result of Branagh's desire to flaunt as much versatility as possible, but is also symptomatic of the fact that he hasn't worked *Much Ado* out as a film at all. He still thinks of it as a play, or rather as a playscript—a succession of scenes that neither flow into nor counterpoint each other in any dynamic way, but simply keep on coming. He uses mood changes the way he might lower backdrops—for expediency, and to keep things rolling.

This might not be so bad if he had an interesting blend of filmic models, but he doesn't. There's a bit of Western, a bit of MGM musical, a bit of Busby Berkeley, and a lot of what can only be called Channel 4 pastoral. What we have is essentially all-singing, all-roistering Merchant-Ivory.

Branagh's conception of the play is quite simple. He sees it as "comic, lusty and full-blooded", a vision betokened by the presence in a minor role of Brian Blessed, whose main function seems to be to quaff, guffaw and slap as many bottoms as possible. Branagh claims he used American actors "for their emotional fearlessness . . . That's how I think you should deal with Shakespeare, that sort of blood-and-guts, high-octane approach."

That doesn't come across in the casting. Denzel Washington gives Don Pedro an air of butch, benevolent stateliness but hardly impinges; while Keanu Reeves as the nasty Don John is a plank—a highly-waxed plank, at that (does he have statutory bare chest written into his contract?). There's an overall mismatch between the British and American contingents. The Americans underplay for the screen and miss the text's rhythm by miles, the Brits favour a theatrical demonstrativeness that the direction can't accommodate.

As an actors' film, *Much Ado* sets out to be democratic, a venture in which everyone gets to show their stuff. This works worst in the pairing of Michael Keaton and Ben Elton as comic coppers. Required to gallop around on imaginary horses, clip-clopping ostentatiously, they seem to be trying to master some bizarre mime exercise. The only people who really chime off each other, not surprisingly, are Branagh and Thompson, who go about their amorous warring with convincing vitriol—a dash of Hepburn and Tracy perhaps, but rather more of Kenneth Williams and Hattie Jacques in *Carry On Matron*.

The problem isn't that the film sells itself so heavily as an accessible entertainment, dispelling any hint of elitist mystique; but that it does it so unimaginatively. It indulges a cast that's wildly uneven in skill, and thereby ends up excluding the audience. The sense of an enclosed community—the film is shot in an idyllic 14th-century villa—merely increases this alienation. Swell time was had by all; a comparably swell time *can't* be had by the audience. It increases the sense of a complacent garden diversion. All the world's a stage—except here, where all the world's the Regent's Park Open Air Theatre.

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English enigma: Edward Elgar

Edward Pearce enjoys the non-PC pleasures of English music

War in the cathedral

The Three Choirs Festival at Worcester began sadly this year with the sudden illness of Sir Edward Downes. A haemorrhage of the eye for a musician who must always wear thick glasses is frightening. But anxiety is deepened by affection; Ted Downes is probably the best-liked conductor for orchestral players since Barbirolli; and he and the BBC Philharmonic are the spine of this festival. They do the big concerts in the cathedral and were to open the festival on Saturday. So anxiety for Downes was compounded by anxiety for his replacement, the cathedral choir master, Donald Hunt.

A moment's wobble in the slowest passage of Elgar's *Cockaigne*, like a bicycle losing velocity, was swiftly forgotten with a power-gathering, beautifully paced *Song of the High Hills*. Then Hunt took choir and orchestra into simple triumph with Walton's *Belshazzar's Feast*. He did not have the huge resources—two brass bands including the Brighouse and Rastrick—on which Walton got his hands at the Leeds premier in 1931. But the BBC brass sufficed, triumphantly.

The exclamatory abruptness that makes the great sound rise like soaring columns was achieved. Hunt and his soloist, the ENO bass Alan Opie, understood that *Belshazzar* is drama, impact and attack. Properly done, it hits an audience like a high tide smashing cliffs; and high tide was accomplished.

The Three Choirs has advanced from its narrow choral tradition rooted in the early 18th century (this is the 265th festival), and from the equally narrow Elgarism that made it for years the celebration of a favourite son. Composers such as Charles Koechlin, Poulenc and Shostakovich get a look in along with the German classics. But there is a core of Englishness on the three-year circuit round Hereford, Gloucester and Worcester.

The cathedral houses major performances nightly and provides the festival facilities. An English cathedral close, like English music, is not politically correct: words like "cosy", "insular" and "banal" leap to the progressive pen. But to dismiss Elgar or Handel resonating in the vaulting of the great cathedral set above an English river is to dismiss pleasure itself.

The Three Choirs is not the place for earnest new theatre; it is central for choral and orchestral music, strong also in chamber pieces and with a good poetry tradition (emphasis this year was on war poetry linked with Britten's *War Requiem*). However, the *Te Deum* of Dominic Argento, the Sicilian-American contemporary, is music to the aesthetic right of Britten. Argento is a pupil of Dallapiccola and Howard Hanson; it's Hanson, the US continuation of Sibelius, who shows.

The interlacing of the Latin text (exactly in the way of the *War Requiem*) with English medieval poems, set to unaffectedly tonal music, will give offence in avant-garde circles. And I am not sure of my own conclusions. But, properly promoted, Argento's *Te Deum* could go into commercial orbit exactly like Gorecki and Tavener. Except that it is *not* minimalism. Perhaps soft-core Britten via Hanson defines it. It will divide critics from public; but were they ever united?

What should divide nobody was the brilliantly chosen programme of the Allegri Quartet: Elgar and the last of Britten. Britten, as always, nods to modernity with little percussive decorations, but his heart and purpose are tonal; and in this dying work the heart fades into darkness. Like the music Shostakovich wrote near his end, it is a black confrontation with death. The Elgar Quartet, from the end of his creative life, is quite as fine: Elgar unpurpled, no longer grandiloquent but still singing. The Allegri produced one of those performances, totally given over to and involved in the music, that end by involving the hearers just as deeply.

This year's festival, then, has a dark tinge, but nothing is darker than Britten's *War Requiem*. The *Requiem*, based on Wilfred Owen's trench poems, ascended to its dry anti-triumph on Monday evening: "I am the enemy you killed my friend . . . let us sleep now". This is not opulent Britten and it has gritty stretches of near-recitation. But waiting upon its great climaxes, it still commands after 30 years; and after 75 years (since 1918) it has never seemed more relevant.

Angus Calder watches local and global culture meet in Edinburgh

International anthems

At the Usher Hall, the Orquestra de Cambra Teatre Lliure from Catalonia played, with flair and fervour, the intensely Andalusian music of Lorca's friend Manuel de Falla: rather like an Irish band performing Elgar. The remarkable "authentic" flamenco singer, whose smoky cries in *El Amor Brujo* reminded me of Bessie Smith, also came from Barcelona.

Music is an international language. That has been underlined by the wondrous playing of Janacek's fiercely Czech piano music by the German Andreas Schiff, and the shiver-making singing of Wolf and Debussy songs by the American soprano Sylvia McNair. The notion that national characteristics are artistically valid only in so far as they speak "universally" seems to hold up well in the context of the International Festival.

But as old Hugh MacDiarmid emphasised, "international" implies "nations". If we Scots don't speak to each other, the rest of you won't hear anything worthwhile from us. The cultures of smallish nations have their own peculiar strengths. There has been nothing in Scotland to match the glories of Czech classical music. But, thanks in part to Burns, we have the strongest surviving tradition of folk music in Europe and the story-telling of Scott, Stevenson and Conan Doyle has imprinted itself on the western imagination.

"Watching the Scots watching the Scots" was how one visitor summed up the experience of TAG Theatre's *Sunset Song* in the Kirk Assembly Hall. Lewis Grassic Gibbon's *A Scots Quair*, a trilogy of which this is the first part, is still a fairly well-kept Scottish secret. The novels take Chris Guthrie, daughter of a Kincardine crofter, through the extinction of peasant culture by the Great War, into the General Strike as a minister's wife (*Cloud Howe*) and, in *Grey Granite*, to the Slump in the coarse city of "Duncairn".

Gibbon's rich polyphony includes vivid evocations of north-eastern speech that Glaswegians tend to find incomprehensible, let alone English tourists. His vision is informed by uncompromising Marxism, as mistrustful of Bolshevik elitism as of Labour opportunism. Alastair Cording's adaptation of all three parts, running over six hours, has an epic range not far short of the *Ring*. On the day I devoted to it, the bond between a mainly Scottish audience and a committed troupe of actors and musicians became fervent, mixing pride and sentiment with anger.

For those of us who have watched the de-

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velopment of Scottish theatre, the significant fact in TAG's success was the way they used what has become a national style of small-scale touring theatre. From John McGrath's 7:84, combining pantomime, politics and music, through David MacLennan's Wildcat and Gerry Mulgrew's Communicado (great stories with music and choreography), a dramatic language has evolved.

Whatever one's reservations about some rather uninspired dancing and a "folk" score verging on the saccharine, TAG serves Gibbon's story with complete integrity. It's unfair to single out members of the cast, but Michael Mackenzie astonished us all with his performances as Chris Guthrie's father and her third husband. Pauline Knowles, as Chris, not only achieves the peculiar combination of warmth and shrewd intelligence suggested by Gibbon, but also sings beautifully. TAG has given the Assembly Hall another Scottish masterpiece to follow the famous productions there of Lindsay's *Three Estates*.

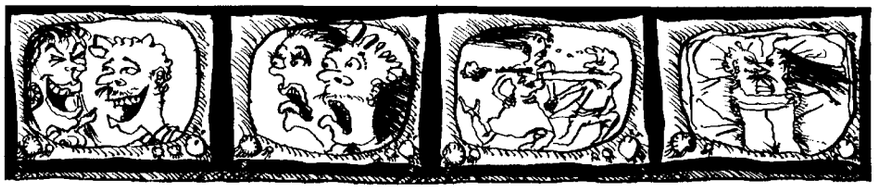
Just as well. I had been getting broody watching our very finest talents turning away from our central strengths in song and story. The film *Walk me Home*, which Tim Neat made with John Berger, is *about* story-telling: a disgusting old layabout beds a woman academic in Hamburg and they share a fantasy life in the Hebrides. Despite the astonishing acting of Angela Winkler and some very beautiful cinematography, this doesn't move as a story at all. The self-indulgent script might have been devised by a committee consisting of a wise old Rabbi, a Taoist sage and a poststructuralist aphorist.

Music is provided by Jim Sutherland, once of a fine folk group called Easy Club. He has written a richer recorded score for Communicado's *Legend of St Julien* at the Traverse, based on Flaubert's story. The master storyteller Mulgrew is trying to do it with very few words, developing ideas from visual texts created by the important painter Keith McIntyre. With mime and dance, the narrative is sustained successfully, but one isn't *moved*.

Most perversely of all, our latest culture-hero, young James Macmillan, collaborates with the playwright Ian Heggie, but throws away both folk-roots and story in his chamber opera, *Tourist Variations*. A couple sees some tourists and natter for an hour about tourism in a fussy production by Francesco Negrin. Macmillan's music evinces his usual vitality, but its idiom gets stuck between the wars in jazz-influenced modernism, and works like a parody of Stravinsky, Weill and Gershwin.

There are 18 pieces by Macmillan in the Festival programme, four of them brand new. His gifts were confirmed by Graeme McNaught's superb playing of a brief piano sonato in the Queen's Hall. However, *Tourist Variations* were far less successful than Jimmy Logan's recreation of *Scottish Variety* in the 1950s. Even in depths of the most Unionist decade of Scottish history, gutsy comics such as Logan kept something going. Festival director Brian McMaster, who gave Jimmy lots of money to do the job properly, should follow up by finding further use for three very young jugglers from Glasgow whose witty act upstaged all the rest.

JACI STEPHEN



If white comedy writers should avoid black stereotypes, black writers ought to shun white ones

Black actors generally have a hard deal in Britain. Invariably they are cast as "problem" individuals who, if they are not criminals themselves, are the victims of racial abuse.

Rarely does a black man or woman appear purely in the role of a human being; there must always be a reason for their presence in the drama. When attempts are made to counter this stereotyping, the results are often laughable, and they begin to look like tokenism.

Trix Worrell broke all barriers (at least, in Britain) when he wrote the award-winning *Desmond's* for Channel 4. Set in a hairdressing salon, it featured an almost exclusively black cast, and it was hilarious. This was in some part due to the specially invited audience, who responded with American-type wildness and enthusiasm to almost every line. But it also owed much to Worrell's strong characterisation and dialogue.

Worrell's new comedy series, *What You Looking At?* (ITV, Saturday), shows the same talents, but the white creations now have the very stereotypical attributes that black actors find unacceptable when imposed on them. The fact that Worrell is black is irrelevant. If stereotyping is wrong, it's wrong for all, and the way to fight it is not simply to do unto others as you have been done by.

The series is set in a south London youth club, which is run by English rose Jane Wainwright. She talks as if she has an orchard in her mouth, which is only slightly more acceptable when you realise the actress is Trevyn McDowell, of *Capital City* fame. In that drama, she had a French orchard in her mouth (or was it Polish? . . . No, that was the other one we couldn't understand). Anyway, the point is that it's hard to tell whether she's trying to get rid of her own accent, or trying to talk in character (silly little English woman who knows bugger all about black culture). I suspect the latter.

Then there's Colin (Bill Moody), a mummy's boy who brings his tea to the club in a Snoopy flask. The problem whites also include a punk girl with a mother who sleeps around. By contrast, the blacks are tough, sassy, funny, lively, bright and immensely lovable.

Elvis (Paul Sharma) is a Fonz-type poser, Mrs Williams (Angela Wynter) a sharp-tongued assistant, Lynford (Gary Mcdonald) the muscles of the piece, and Trevor (Robert McKewley) the leader of the gang and the star. Also extremely lovable is Pumpkin the dog, trained by Animal Actors.

It's hard, but essential, for any writer to establish characters from the outset, and Worrell did so successfully in this opening episode. The storyline wasn't too strong (English rose attempts to get lads to change their unhealthy diet), but it's clear Worrell has another winning cast on his hands.

I'd be interested to know at what stage the stereotypical whites found their way into the script. Worrell is clearly ill at ease with them, and his writing dies when they open their mouths. The fact that Humphrey Barclay Productions made this for the mass market-oriented London Weekend Television makes me suspect outside interference.

Stereotypes have, and always will be, anathema to David Lynch and Mark Frost, whose *Twin Peaks* mesmerised a huge chunk of the BBC2 audience. Now we have *On the Air* (BBC2, Saturday), a bizarre comedy series about a 1957 TV station called ZBC.

Some of the actors we know from *Twin Peaks*, and those who weren't in it look as if they could have been. This week, the ZBC studio boss Bud Budwaller had to find a replacement for the Great Presidio, an act which had been due to appear on the *Lester Guy Show*.

But, as in *Twin Peaks*, the plot was irrelevant; visual entertainment is all. One man had, seemingly for no reason, started to fit a water pipe in the studio. Two characters, again for no apparent reason, appeared with bandages on their foreheads; one man made a brief appearance carrying a giant tooth.

Peakies will love it. *Birds of a Feather* fans probably won't. But it's yet another import that outshines the majority of comedy shows on British TV.

Back on Channel 4, home-grown programmes do provide a greater variety of comedy. On Friday 3 September, look out for *Paul Merton—The Series* (Hat Trick Productions). Merton, whose success on *Have I Got News For You* made him a conservatory name ("household" is for when he gets to BBC1), has allegedly turned down an offer to join the BBC on a permanent basis, claiming that he couldn't produce enough material to fill the slots offered.

It's probably a wise decision. The first show in the new series is packed with brilliant and original ideas and sketches. To water down this talent for the sake of filling a few extra hours would do Merton's extraordinary ability no service. Rabbit fans are advised not to tune in.

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Nanny and charge on a segregated bench. The photographer Peter Magubane has observed, and taken part in, the struggle against apartheid for 40 years. "Women of South Africa: their fight for freedom" (Little, Brown £16.99) contains images from the early protests of the 1950s to the present

Books of genesis

IN SEARCH OF THE AUTHENTIC AFRICA

Marek Kohn

Thirty-five years on, **Sir Laurens van der Post** returned to the place where he had explored the rock paintings of the Bushmen, as he still calls them. All, naturally, was touristised. His old spiritual inspirations were engaged in making toy arrows for the visitors, whom they guided round what was once their own culture and now had been turned into heritage. A universal tale; apt, in a way, for the people Sir Laurens sees as the prototypical essence of humanity.

In one detail, too, he shared their fate. When he made his original sally into the sacred terrain, he apologised to the relevant spirits in writing, burying his message in a gin bottle. This was subsequently removed to the Botswana national museum. In his essay "The Little Memory" (reissued with "The Great Memory" and one new piece in *The Voice of the Thunder*; Chatto & Windus, £15.99), Sir Laurens merely notes the fact. If he felt any indignation about being stuck in the showcase of history along with the "stone age civilisation", he keeps it to himself.

Also noted only in passing is the fact that his expedition set in motion the train of developments that transformed the site and the local people's life. But visionaries rarely pause to quibble with irony or contradiction, such as Sir Laurens' use of television to depict the "lost world" of the Kalahari while bemoaning the alienating effects of modernity.

The quest into Africa, now ethnological rather than territorial, becomes a quest for images of human nature in ancestral forms. Two African peoples in particular have been conscripted to this project; Sir Laurens' Bushmen, representing what he takes to be the prelapsarian condition of humanity, and the Masai, who now seem to have been waiting since time immemorial for the invention of the fashion shoot.

The image industry inevitably brings a tendency to the ersatz with it. Travelling by bike through Kenya (*The Ukimwi Road: from Kenya to Zimbabwe*; John Murray, £16.99), **Dervla Murphy** noticed that the imitation spears brandished by Masai men, now following herds of tourists rather than cattle, were covered in tinfoil. Herdsmanship has been squeezed out by the development of game parks for tourism, she observes; there is nothing left for the Masai except dressing up in costume and posing for cash.

They retain a nobler cast in **Justin Cartwright**'s *Masai Dreaming* (Macmillan, £14.99), a novel set in the hyperreality of cinema and faithful to the exacting aesthetic standards of that medium. Everything, no matter how sad or degraded, is impeccably elegant. It's a contractual obligation. The novel is undertaken, accomplished, polished, all the while mindful of the impossibility of its task. "Elie Wiesel said a novel about Auschwitz is either not a novel or not about Auschwitz," muses Cartwright's narrator. "What about a movie where the main character ends up in Auschwitz?" And what about a novel about a narrator writing the script; the true, startling story is the subplot.

If it were *The Player*, the joke would be that the nascent movie was *Out Of Africa-meets-Shoah*. Tim Curtiz, the narrator, is in the Masai country to research the life and death of Claudia Cohn-Casson, a French-Jewish anthropologist who left Africa to face her fate in wartime Europe. Agreeing with Emile Durkheim that Jewish ethnicity would fade as society became secularised, her father had urged her to study the sciences of human society. In the Masai, as in any other group, the universal elements of social organisation could be elucidated.

Her father's faith in rationality, which induces him to assume a posture that other Jews call collaboration, is eventually their undoing. That's the simple story, the Hollywood version, on which is hung a Hollywood reading of the universal; it becomes a "universal spirit" which, in a message smuggled from the cattle truck, Claudia thanks the Masai for revealing to her.

There are no thanks to the natives from the narrator of *On The Contrary* (Secker & Warburg, £14.99), **André Brink**'s infernally beautiful new novel. In style and theme it has similarities with *The First Life of Adamastor*, published earlier this year. Like *Adamastor*, it is a tale that constantly ranges into the fantastic and back, told by a figure from the early period of European settlement in South Africa. *Adamastor* was the overture; *On The Contrary* is the whole opera in all its might.

The title is given as being Ibsen's last words; the book is "the life of a famous rebel, soldier, traveller, explorer, reader, builder, scribe, Latinist, lover and liar". Estienne Barbier was a French adventurer who made his way to the Cape in the 18th century, fell out with the authorities and staged a campaign of banditry that acquired a rudimentary political dimension. Brink places him in the condemned cell, awaiting the crucifixion, decapitation, drawing and quartering that befits such a man of parts. There Barbier writes to Rosette, a slave woman around whom, *in extremis*, all his desire and all his guilt coalesce.

These are confessions, but not true ones. The first sentence is adapted from one of Derrida's: this is a text that frequently seems to speak to its author, rather than the other way around. Often Barbier's brutality is revealed as an aside; as when, in a hurry to see the colony's potentate, he slays a guard who is rude to him.

It is impossible to separate the violence he would like to have committed from that he actually did, but Barbier's capacity for spilling blood without compunction comes to seem limitless. Outside the European settlement, there is virtually nothing to inhibit him and his followers from wholesale slaughter. To them, hottentots are one more species of animal. The land itself provokes the violence, he says, by its inaccessibility. It will not talk back, so the band uses violence as a language; "the scrawl of our progress".

His bible is *Don Quixote*, his consorts are legion, and his faithful companion is Jeanne

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d'Arc. She it is who advises him in his insurrectionary phase, when he dreams that after he has vanquished his enemies, "the people shall govern". Towards the end, he moves some distance towards redemption. He washes the feet of the Khoikhoin, the people-of-people, not "hottentots".

Barbier searched for Monomotapa, the African El Dorado. He swears he saw a hippogryph—for a long time, he maintains he killed a unicorn too—but liars also swallow lies.

He is a monumental fictional creation, written with a feline fluency. His epic madness makes sense of the relationship between individual conscience and impersonal forces, without muting the truth of either. Today, the climate is right for the Barbiers, criminals transmuted by historical circumstance into political actors in Africa and far beyond.

Finally, some heroines. They emerge, plain, convincing and resolute, along the stops on the Ukimwi Road, done quiet honour by Dervla Murphy's unostentatious percipience. She begins with an eccentric gesture, giving herself a Dawes Ascent mountain bike as a sixtieth birthday present and announcing, to general consternation, that she is departing on a mystery tour.

When she gets to East Africa, responsibility is thrust upon her. Looking at her route map, a pastor called Abraham tells her that much of it lies along the *ukimwi* road; the Aids road. She is old enough to be respected, he tells her; she should use that respect to spread accurate information about the sickness.

Her discomfort with that role notwithstanding, Aids asserts itself unavoidably as she travels. Some of her strongest impressions echo those that have emerged from the epidemic in the west, particularly the determination of those infected to live their lives to the full, instead of waiting to die. And the "feminist hour has come" for African women, who are insisting that equality in sexual choice is not just a matter of rightness, but of life and death.

What irks her more and more, on the other hand, is the western "Aids industry", which she lumps with all the other assistance projects that appear to need big fat spanking new four-wheel-drives as a basic requirement of their existence. All along her route she encounters the things that make westerners shrug and dismiss Africa as a basket case. And she finishes up welcoming the shambles, endorsing the words of Uganda's Professor Ali Mazrui that she quotes in conclusion:

"I'm not unhappy that the ancestors are fighting back, that they are saying, 'Your pact of the post-colonial era is inappropriate and therefore we shall make sure your roads won't work, your trains won't move, your telephones won't ring, your schools won't educate, and your soldiers will take over power every so often. We pronounce a curse upon all your post-colonial arrangements until a new compact of African authenticity is devised.' I'm not unhappy about that curse."

Marek Kohn's "Dope Girls" is published by Lawrence & Wishart

Uneasy rider

SOUTH OF HAUNTED DREAMS
Eddy L Harris
Viking, £15.99

Ellis Cashmore

The epic motorcycle journey enjoys an almost mythical status in contemporary culture. Male sits bestride gleaming, growling mother of all metal beasts, which responds to every twitch of his wrist and roars off down the cambered tarmac. From *Easy Rider* to Robert Pirsig, serpentine road adventures have captivated us. Yet their appeal lies not in the open road, but in the inner discoveries unearthed en route. Imagine how much more wisdom Homer would have acquired with a BMW-K75s between his legs.

Eddy Harris has such a machine. He travels not from Troy to Ithaca, but to the American South—for him, much more than a geographical area: "A way of thinking, a way of feeling, a crucible of ill will . . . a state of mind." Harris is, in his words, "a Blackamerican" engaged in a personal odyssey, the first phase of which took him to Africa.

His chronicle of this, *Native Stranger*, primes the reader for Harris' approach. "I am not an African," he proclaims. "The soil from which I draw my strength, my pride, and my happiness is American soil." His mission now is to "travel this country for the first time as a racist, with color and race always on my mind."

It is as if he plasters the word "race" across his visor as an *aide-mémoire*. "How can you know where you need to get *to* unless you know what you need to get away *from*?" asks Harris, as he takes in the scenes of slave rebellions and devours Georgia's softly rolling hills where, he tells us, thousands of blacks starved or died of disease.

We ride pillion as Harris goes in pursuit of the headquarters of the "Davies County Coon Hunters' Club" in Kentucky; sit in a diner where two waitresses blank him out; listen with him to a sage who insists "racism is bred into you in the South" and that "all you can do is pretend real hard."

It is an uncomfortable journey with digressions that permit Harris to reflect on shaping episodes; such as his rage at white dinner party guests who had the temerity to suggest that life in the US was improving for blacks. Harris reminds them that, as a 35-year-old city dweller, he has already outlived his life expectancy: "I've got a better chance of being dead, or at best on drugs or in jail, than I have of seeing my next birthday."

For Harris, history is never in the past, always with him. "Somewhere in the South, a man is waiting to call me nigger. A man who does not know me . . . Evil lives in the world. Always has. Always will."

Then, an unexpected epiphany; a series of encounters with nothing more mysterious than simple kindness encourages the rider to discard some of his freight. "I had been looking for coon hunters and Klansmen. I should have been looking for angels of mercy." And the incubus is not so much conquered as indemnified, as Harris loses his sense of confrontation. "Evil can be overcome by better angels," says Harris and, from this point, the journey takes a celestial course.

Blandness appears as Harris abandons his original quest and rejoices in his serendipity: "What I have found instead has been my own black soul." Having lifted his visor, Harris sees new vistas. He implores other Blackamericans to do likewise. "We are parties to our own lack of freedom," Harris spouts as he heads towards Platitudesville, "and no matter which side of the gate we are on we are all of us prisoners."

The "someone" who wanted to call Harris a nigger heaves into view at a gas station; and, at Harris' own urging, the cracker does get his way. But no fight ensues; not even anger. "My fear and loathing and most of my rage escaped from me," he reveals, rather proudly. The stirring full-throttle vituperations of early burn-ups decelerate into amusement, and Harris laughs at his accoster.

By the end of his journey, the South looks and feels an altogether better place than it had at the start. "It felt like him," Harris concludes. If travel broadens the mind, this may qualify as enlightenment; but ultimately, it's the kind you might get from the back seat of a Ford Fiesta rather than a high-powered Beamer.

Ellis Cashmore is the author of "The Logic of Racism" (Unwin Hyman)

Desire paths

THE SEXUAL IMAGINATION: A FEMINIST COMPANION
Harriett Gilbert (editor)
Jonathan Cape, £14.99

Veronica Groocock

It's an ambitious undertaking to encompass broad-based theories about sex and sexuality, reworked from a feminist perspective, in a single reference work. And it presents certain fundamental dilemmas. What—and who—to leave out? How to achieve a fair balance? How much space to allocate? Harriett Gilbert must have faced a labyrinthine task in the selection process, let alone in the final editing. In her introduction, she dubs it "a tourist's guide to the structures that contain, explain and express our sexualities". Like all tourist guides, it is highly idiosyncratic.

The book's 350 entries by an international team of eminent feminist contributors are arranged alphabetically. They move from Kathy Acker, Thomas Aquinas, Agony Aunts and Aids, through DH Lawrence, Lesbianism, Masturbation and Mills & Boon, to Mai Zetterling and Emile Zola.

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They are all worth far more than the sum of their parts. Each is a miniature, sensitively crafted essay contained within the collective whole, which is designed to be dipped into and savoured like an exotic, and sometimes erotic, array of choice morsels. They are a joy to read, lacking the neutral tone and style of most traditional reference books in favour of a language that is "graceful and accessible".

The easy way to approach this book is chronologically, as a novel. Infinitely more rewarding, albeit challenging at times, is to follow the trail of cross-references that accompany each entry. This will lead you into some unexpected byways, from Perversion to Heterosexuality, Margaret Atwood to Romantic Fiction. Penis Envy moves to Infantile Sexuality, Picasso to Voyeurism. Tracing these endless associations can become addictive, like some sophisticated postmodern game of words and wits. For those wishing to expand their knowledge of a particular contributor or subject, many entries have a selective bibliography.

Virtually all sexual life is there, in most of its moods and aspects, violent as well as pleasurable: rape, porn and sexual harassment as well as sensuality and erotica. Sexology, the controversial study of sexual behaviour associated with Havelock Ellis, Kinsey and Masters & Johnson (all included individually), is accorded an entry, stating that feminists "have challenged their model of sexuality, arguing that sexuality is not naturally given but socially constructed". Historically, subjects range from the ancient world to the present. Globally, the span is equally wide. The illustrations reflect this.

Such a project, by its very nature, could never be exhaustive—nor, even if it could, would this necessarily be desirable. However, given the ground-breaking broad-mindedness that underpins the book, there are some surprising omissions. Why *Oh! Calcutta* but not *Hair*? *The Microcosm* but not *The Well of Loneliness*? And why exclude one of the first mainstream depictions, on both stage and film, of overtly lesbian sexuality, *The Killing of Sister George*? And no Madonna? No Queer Politics?

As Gilbert concedes, there is clearly a sharper focus on literature than on any of the other arts, which would seem to be a serious shortcoming. And there are some odd inclusions, such as *Honor* (American spellings, alas, throughout): a term sharply differentiated by gender and equated, in women, with "a reputation for sexual propriety".

The book is interesting both for the broad sweep of topics covered and the diversity of views expressed—on issues such as pornography, psychoanalysis, prostitution, bisexuality and monogamy. And for its individual contributors: Sara Lefanu on Andrea Dworkin, Ros Coward on Germaine Greer, Aileen La Tourette on Colette.

It's the kind of book guaranteed to provoke passionate debate, but this in no way detracts from its value as a reliable and inspiring resource. This is a welcome new perspective on a universal theme that will, I suspect, leave many readers wanting more.

"Hurrah! the butter's all gone!" Montage by John Heartfield (1935), inspired by Goering's preference for hardware; in "Realism, Rationalism, Surrealism: art between the wars" by David Batchelor, Briony Fer and Paul Wood (Yale University Press, £14.95)

A Nazi genius

THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO HEIDEGGER
Charles B Guignon (editor),
£12.99 paperback/£40 hardback
MARTIN HEIDEGGER: A POLITICAL LIFE
Hugo Ott
HarperCollins, £20

Stephen Howe

Martin Heidegger was by far the most influential philosopher of the 20th century. Wittgenstein, and maybe one or two others, may have had as deep an impact within the profession, but Heidegger's imprint has been felt across almost every intellectual discipline: most recently, in literary theory and environmentalist thought.

Heidegger was also a Nazi. That was never a secret. The nature and extent of his complicity with Nazism were intensely debated in Germany almost from the moment the war ended. In Günter Grass's *Dog Years*, in 1963, Heidegger is already figured as the arch-villain, somehow responsible for Hitler's very existence. Grass's hero, the embittered ex-soldier Matern, carries Heidegger's *Being and Time* throughout the war "from Warsaw to Dunkirk, from Salonika to Odessa, from the Mius front to Kaiserhofen battery". He blames the book for what has happened to him, to Germany and to Europe.

There is something strange, then, about the way the "Heidegger controversy" has periodically renewed itself over the years, as if each time knowledge of the thinker's political record were a novelty and a scandal. Perhaps the huge cohort of Heidegger's admirers, so many of them politically left-wing, have had to undertake recurrent bouts of repression.

The argument was renewed, especially in France where Heideggerianism has been strongest, by Victor Farias's book *Heidegger et le Nazisme*. This was in many ways a shoddy effort; ignorant about Heidegger's philosophy, riddled with misquotation, seeking unconvincingly to indict Heidegger for anti-semitism, in fact the aspect of Nazi ideology of which he was least guilty.

Much of Farias's actual documentation came from the researches of Hugo Ott, an economic historian at the philosopher's own university of Freiburg. Now Ott's own book, infinitely more careful, gives us the fullest account yet possible of Heidegger's political views and activities.

It is a thoroughly damning account; but it chronicles the behaviour of a provincial academic essentially without political influence. The only institutional power Heidegger ever held was in his brief period as Rector of his university. He exercised that authority in a disgraceful way: vigorously aligning the university with Hitler's policies and cooperating avidly with the purge of ideologically or racially unsound teachers.

However, what Heidegger did in 1933-34 was sadly run-of-the-mill for its time and place in everything except the intellectual stature of the man responsible. For that matter, I've experienced or witnessed most of the traits Heidegger displayed, as no doubt have many people who work in academia: whispering campaigns against colleagues, threats to free expression, abuse of the petty power of institutional authority, contempt for intellectual values masquerading as political principle. Shoddy as it was, the behaviour Ott documents does not stand out as especially wicked nor as especially important.

The real scandal is Heidegger's behaviour *after* 1945. He continued to write and, after a teaching ban was lifted, to lecture prolifically for a further two decades. Until his death in 1976, he remained entirely silent about Nazism's crimes. Old friends, former colleagues, younger admirers—and they included very many of those German-Jewish intellectuals who survived—who appealed for *something* from him on the subject were tragically rebuffed. Almost anything, it seems, would have sufficed; from a genuinely philosophical engagement with evil to a simple "Sorry". It never came.

Not only did Heidegger remain silent; he continued—albeit usually in the most oblique ways—to express his conviction that Nazism had contained a noble but hidden message, an "inner truth and greatness" as he put it in 1953. It was a message known only to Heidegger himself, certainly not to Hitler nor to the talentless hacks who became the regime's official philosophers.

The relationship between Heidegger's politics and his philosophy has been endlessly and often bitterly disputed. Ott steers resolutely clear of it. He is, he insists, writing purely as an historian producing a political

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biography, not trespassing on the philosophers' territory. The distinctions cannot be so rigidly maintained: Ott *does* have a thesis to advance, about the centrality of Heidegger's tortured relationship to Catholicism.

We care about Heidegger's politics not because he was a university official who was also a Nazi, but because he was indubitably the greatest genius who was also a Nazi. It's entirely proper that in a different kind of book, the Cambridge anthology, his political misdeeds should occupy only a small space.

Yet although only one of the Guignon volume's 13 essays, an excellent piece by Thomas Sheehan, directly addresses the biographical and political issues, they inevitably creep into many of the others. Michael Zimmerman, investigating a three-way relationship between Heidegger's thought, Buddhism and deep ecology, can't escape the worry that ecologists attracted to Heidegger must face: the fact that his environmentalism flowed from the same roots as his Nazism.

The question is not really whether one can, or should, draw sharp distinctions between the man and the work, but how far one can compartmentalise the thought. The philosopher of Being who gnawed away at the question "Why is there anything at all, rather than nothing?" carries few if any political messages. The most one can reasonably say is that the literary style of *Being and Time*—grandiose, portentous, even violent—has certain elective affinities with the language that in the same years coalesced around themes of race, nation, leadership and the will to power.

It is not a negligible point, but it's a very long way from showing that the *substance* of Heidegger's early thought points towards fascism. On the other hand, the Heidegger of the more readable later writings, the great opponent of modernity, anti-humanist, anti-democratic thinker whose work is closer to poetry and pagan theology than to conventional philosophy—this Heidegger does carry strong political implications.

Maybe there were German soldiers, like Grass's Matern, who fought their way across Europe carrying Heidegger in their knapsacks. Maybe even, though I find it unlikely, there were those whose participation in conquest and genocide was somehow influenced by the philosopher's teachings. But soldiers at war, if they carry books close to their hearts, are surely more likely to use them for escape than for inspiration. A former Panzer commander once told me—as something desperately important to him, the key to his inner attitude—how through every campaign he held on to one possession: a book banned by the regime he was serving, Heine's poems.

And that half-educated bureaucrat of death, Adolf Eichmann, claimed to have been decisively influenced by just one philosopher. Not Heidegger, not Nietzsche or Schopenhauer, but the great humanitarian and internationalist, Immanuel Kant. The message, I suspect, is that there is no message: that philosophy's potential for political good or evil is very limited indeed. Probably poetry is more important. About that, at least, the later Heidegger was absolutely right.

Jealous God

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JESUS CHRIST
José Saramago (translated by Giovanni Pontiero)
Harvill, £8.99

Ruth Pavey

José Saramago is Portugal's leading writer, now in his seventies. Despite this eminence, it is not hard to see why he ran into stormy weather after publishing this book. Written in a tender, respectful tone, its purpose emerges only gradually. But it becomes unmistakeable in a key scene towards the end, with a devastating excoriation of cruel religious practice. In a boat hemmed in by sea mist, cut off from normal time, God, the Devil and Jesus engage in unequal discussion. Their subject is the future course of that which has not yet come into being: Christianity.

Jesus, powerless except to ask questions, badgers from a reticent God a preview of the carnage to come, the agony to be endured in his name. Although his delivery is concise, God needs the next eight pages for his (incomplete) catalogue of "abnegation, tears, suffering, torment, every conceivable form of death known or as yet unrevealed". Even the Devil is shocked: "Although I myself have caught glimpses of the light and darkness ahead, I never realised that the light was coming from the burning stakes and the shadows from innumerable corpses."

In Saramago's characterisation, Jesus is neither wimp nor superman, just the thoughtful, tender-hearted son of a carpenter. The deal before him, very much an offer he cannot refuse, is posthumous power and glory. In exchange he must be the earthly representative, the sacrificial lamb through whom the Hebrew God will pursue his desire for universal sovereignty. Having heard what this will entail, Jesus is reduced to saying, "I don't want this glory". God snaps back: "But I want that power."

The Devil offers to abdicate, in order to avoid so much bloodshed. But God is quick to see the flaw in this arrangement: "if you were to come to an end, so would I; for Me to be Goodness, it is essential that you should continue to be Evil". The Devil swims off, God and the mist evaporate. Jesus rows in to find he has been away for 40 days, that a crowd awaits him, and that Simon Peter is adopting the role of manager. The rest of the tale we know, though it is somewhat changed in the telling.

The sacrifice of two doves in the Temple, to ensure Mary's purification after the birth of Jesus, is the first substantial indication of Saramago's standpoint. Allowing himself only glancing asides, he relies on the scene to speak for itself. He has us accompany Joseph, Mary and Jesus into the Court of the Gentiles, to buy the doves amid the "smell of blood and singed feathers". Things get worse as we move inwards, court by court.

First, Gentiles are excluded, then women, and all the time there is an increasing stench, smoke, and howling, bleating, shouting, till the furnace and slaughterhouse are reached. Numerous animals are being killed on two stone slabs. Joseph is moved to murmur: "My God, my God, how fragile You have made us and how vulnerable to death." Nevertheless, the Holy Family leave, unperturbed. But by the end of the chapter, Herod has already ordered the Massacre of the Innocents.

The story of Christ's life has not lacked interpreters. Nikos Kazantzakis, in his novel *The Last Temptation*, has Jesus emerge as a triumphant hero. But in questioning the horrors of Christian martyrdom and celebrating human affection, Saramago is nearer to Shusaku Endo, the great Japanese Catholic novelist. For Saramago's Jesus there is no triumph, only pity. His last cry from the cross is changed to "Men, forgive Him, for He knows not what He has done".

Irish drift

EXCURSIONS IN THE REAL WORLD
William Trevor
Hutchinson, £16.99

Patricia Craig

The real world as opposed to the world of fiction, that is; these enjoyable essays by William Trevor provide a series of glimpses into the novelist's past. He was born in Mitchelstown, Co Cork, in 1928, a Protestant in a Catholic culture, and without even the eclat that ownership of a "big house" might have conferred. His father was a bank clerk, and his childhood peripatetic: after Mitchelstown came Youghal and Skibbereen, and that was only the start.

The family curtains, he notes, "were altered to fit windows" all over the place—windows, moreover, looking out on a not entirely hospitable vista. De Valera's Ireland didn't provide much sense of community for its non-Catholic inhabitants, whom it treated without animosity but without a great deal of comprehension. These small-town southern Protestants never found themselves completely assimilated. Trevor, as a writer, may have been lucky in this respect, and in his family's constant moves. Both accorded him an outsider's perspective, allowing his powerful gift for observation to flourish.

The essays in this book (snippets, really) don't by any means lay bare the writer; William Trevor is, and remains, "a very private person" to whom autobiographical disclosure doesn't come easily. They do, however, both isolate and illuminate the backgrounds to his novels and stories. Cork, Tipperary, Wexford, Dublin . . . then London, the south of England, Venice, and back to famine-stricken Ireland in the 1840s. Trevor rightly disclaims nostalgia in his excursions: his cast of mind is altogether tougher.

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True, these pieces have more in the way of charm, and rather less bleakness and irony, than Trevor's fiction; but they don't come without a pleasing precision and idiosyncrasy to give the charm an edge. The novelist's characteristic engagement with foibles of social behaviour is greatly in evidence, particularly in the sections on school life, which—in his experience—seems to have been abundant in boys' and masters' eccentricities. ("He had been known to sit on the ledge of the mantlepiece in the masters' common room to see if anyone would notice.")

Trevor may have been unconsciously assembling his material during these years, but it wasn't until the publication of *The Old Boys* (his second novel) in 1964 that he acquired a settled purpose. Before that, it was a matter of drifting—through 13 schools, through Trinity College, Dublin, various schoolmastering posts (calling to mind, in their seedy, throwaway comedy, *Decline and Fall*) and a stint as a copywriter with Notley's in London, in the company of some poets. Gavin Ewart, Peter Porter and Edward Lucie-Smith were earning a living in this way too; and Ted Hughes crops up later.

Towards the end of this collection, toned-down autobiography merges with some seductive travel writing and literary comment, including a piece on Somerville & Ross—which seems to me altogether too tolerant of the fox-hunting antics and amazed amusement of these ladies when confronted by the ever-thickening consonants and headlong illogicality of their social inferiors. As writers, they're at the opposite extreme from William Trevor, in whom elegance and accuracy are matched by the strongest appreciation of the social climate, in Ireland and elsewhere. We should be grateful for the selection of events and images in the real world that have elicited an inspired response from the storyteller.

Digging deep

LIMESTONE AND CLAY
Lesley Glaister
Secker & Warburg, £8.99

Mary Scott

Lesley Glaister's last novel, *Digging to Australia*, plunged gloriously and wholeheartedly into the Gothic; *Limestone and Clay* hovers a touch disconcertingly on the brink. There are several sound reasons for the book's edginess. All of its characters teeter on the verge of personal epiphany, but never quite achieve the clarity of vision which would allow them to make sense of what they've seen.

They are uneasy with each other, too. Geography teacher and caver Simon (the "Limestone" of the title) and potter Nadia (the "Clay") tread warily in a relationship that threatens to suffocate them both. The tiny flat they share is equally claustrophobic; in the opening scene Nadia, doing yoga in the bedroom, inhales the "meaty smell" of the lamb Simon is roasting in the kitchen and hears the small pop of the wine cork. And when his caver friends Celia and Miles arrive for lunch there is so little room to breathe that Nadia, once she has eaten, rushes off in search of fresh air.

Glaister creates mood superbly. Her writing is rich with thick, nauseating smells; with nasty tastes in the mouth; with food that lies in the stomach "like a greasy ball"; and with dreams as heavy and viscous as the blood that soaks the pad between Nadia's thighs. The blood is Nadia's problem; she yearns for a baby.

Simon yearns for Nadia. Unlike his other women, Celia included, Nadia is not a "soap-and-water type". She is dark, exotic, the very image of fecundity; but it is Celia who proves instantly, efficiently and disastrously fertile.

Enter odd-eyed Iris from the flat downstairs, who divides her time between hawking cosmetics and reading leaves. Iris has a grotesque couch-potato husband whose beard, "luxuriant as any prophet's and liberally clotted with food, cascades over his belly" and a stinky black crow called Darling. Iris tells Nadia's fortune. What purpose this serves in the subsequent drama is unsatisfyingly unclear; the predictions are off-beam, but only slightly.

Meanwhile, Nadia has turned sculptor. She invites Iris to model for her. But when she has finished, what has she made? "The thing is puzzling to look at, but intriguing. Is it? Or is it simply nonsense? Nadia longs for fresh eyes." Instead, she is confronted by Celia and by the startling, brutal truth about Celia's pregnancy.

From this point, the novel dips deeper and deeper into obsession. In parallel narratives so unsettling that they are almost unpleasant to read, Nadia acts out her yearning for a child with a *real* baby and Simon follows his "explorer's heart" into the depths of Curlew Cavern in search of "understanding".

Both find only the claustrophobia they sought to leave behind. And Simon's dramatic almost-epiphany comes near to stifling him for ever. At this juncture, there's a rather annoying little interlude with Celia and her husband Dan—whom we haven't met before. They aren't particularly pleasant characters, these two, and they certainly hold up the action. I wished they'd go away and let me get on with the dark, powerful stuff between the main protagonists.

Dark and powerful it is. Indeed, the writing is so strong that it almost sweeps all before it. But at the end there are too many unanswered questions: about motive, character and the meaning of incident. The complex, jittery relationship between Simon and Nadia remains—like Simon's revelation below ground and Nadia's strange, new sculpture—unexplored, unexplained. This is an intriguing novel; but it intrigues just a little more than it should.

Mary Scott will be reading from her fiction at the South Bank Centre on 29 September

PRINTOUT

Bubbling VAT

Boyd Tonkin

NSS readers will be pleased to learn about a new cookery book due from Bloomsbury next March. "Clare's Kitchen" is the literary debut of the famous London caterer Clare Latimer, who has struck what the Bookseller reports as a "sizeable deal" with her publishers. She will be joining one of the trade's few recession-proof corners. This summer's unexpected chart-topper was Delia Smith's exquisite "Summer Collection", which has outsold Jeffrey Archer up and down the land. So there is justice in this world. Meanwhile, Vikram Seth's elephantine saga "A Suitable Boy" has stomped around the Top 10 for months at a price of £20.

Now, £20 is quite enough, but would Seth have sold so heavily at £23.50? That will be his unit cost if, as is widely feared, Kenneth Clarke slaps VAT at 17.5 per cent on the printed word in November. The book business has cried wolf so often over VAT that some observers will ignore the yelps again. But, for me, the writing on the wall began when the industry's Hands Off Reading campaign was refused a stall for this year's Tory conference: forbidden, that is, to support a VAT exemption that remains official government policy.

The Treasury estimates that VAT on print could raise around £1 billion annually towards its sponsored slim for the £50 billion deficit, with £250 million from books. As this column has argued before, VAT at the full rate would leave the celebrity cooks and thriller merchants safely in place and in profit. Price-insensitive academic tomes would just become even more absurdly dear. Only the centre ground of intelligent "trade" books—the space where fresh ideas and talents grow—would suffer fatal blight.

If that occurs, even the Chancellor might shed some crocodile tears onto his Hush Puppies. For the truth is that the book trade alone has done little to provoke the new threat of retail tax. Most of the revenue would come from mass-circulation papers. And ever since the Murdoch and Rothermere organs began to scold John Major and his cabinet, the idea of print VAT as an impost on learning has turned into one more sacred cow, ripe for the Tory rifles. Thanks, Rupe.

So book publishers can rest assured that, when the cigar-puffing Terminator returns, this time it's nothing personal. Except, that is, for the Murdoch-owned HarperCollins, who will spoil the party conference by launching its long-awaited memoirs of a lady of quality (price £25; or maybe £29.37). Remember, too, that if VAT wrecks serious but unsubsidised publishers' lists, it will do the same for similar magazines: such as this one. Now there's a thought. If the worst happens, the Prime Minister might do by accident what he failed to achieve by design.

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ENDGAMES: Weekend Competition

No 3291 Set by Tim Hopkins
We asked for patronising reviews —the sort that imply the critic could have done better.

Report by Ms de Meaner
The trouble is that you never read the instructions. Merely being highly critical was not enough. In fact, even being patronising was not enough. There had to be the *soupçon* of a hint that the reviewer was just itching to grab the pen and write it over. So you find a disappointed judge here. A tenner for those who made it.

West Side Story
The foolhardiness of setting *Romeo and Juliet* in a deprived area of a present-day major city was cruelly apparent to the first-night audience. And the composer did not help his own cause, as, with a self-restricting narrowness he built his musical structure from a Tonic and Dominant enclosed Augmented 4th, searching unsuccessfully for the greater emotional range that Mozart, Beethoven and some of the rest of us have achieved with more orthodox methods.

Sadly, his lyricist, Mr Stephen Sondheim, provided little help. "I feel pretty, oh so pretty, I feel pretty and witty and gay", though daringly implying a verbal ambiguity a few years ahead of its time, did not evoke for me the greatest romantic heroine of all time. Nor did, "Something's coming, I don't know what it is, but it is, gonna be great", entirely encompass the poetic langour of her co-star-crossed lover.

No, Mr Bernstein, this will not do. I suggest that, while avoiding difficult subjects like The Holy Bible and Argentina, he now explore less dangerous themes. For someone of his moderate, if currently misguided, talents I feel sure there's a place somewhere. *(Andrew Lloyd-Webber, aged 9)*

John Farnon

Hamlet
Since T S Eliot criticised the artistic failure of *Hamlet*, one is in good company in having another niggle. For myself, I've always thought the play spoilt by its cheap melodramatic ending; four deaths by stabbing or poisoning in quick succession is perhaps a bit much. Surely it is not dying, but living, that is the stuff of tragedy?

May I, therefore, humbly offer an alternative scenario: Hamlet and Ophelia actually get married. Naturally, the marriage is a disaster. They lead a cat-and-dog life (the dog in this case being, of course, a Great Dane). We get several scenes of domestic conflict. Guilt-ridden, self-pitying, soliloquising, Hamlet goes from bad to worse. The play ends, not with a bang, but a whimpering divorce. We could relate to all this far more readily than to that serial killing at Elsinore castle. We'd emerge from the theatre feeling we'd had a good evening out. "Ah, that's life," we'd say.

Stanley J Sharpless

The Mill on the Floss
It's a brave man who attempts the field of romance, so let's salute Mr Eliot's plucky attempt. But he can hardly expect female readers to be swept off their feet by events in a provincial town. Mr Eliot should switch his researches to city life—London, if need be, ideally a foreign capital. Shift the action and you elevate the sentiments.

Feminine psychology, too, needs more attention. Latin, Greek and religious anguish are the daily occupations of his heroine—surely somewhat masculine recreations. (I suspect Mr Eliot of drawing on his own experiences!)

But just as it seemed that Mr Eliot had mistaken his vocation, a natural heroine appears, albeit as a secondary character. Lucy Deane, the protagonist's cousin, is golden-haired, blue-eyed, with a fine eye for feminine fripperies. Had dull Maggie been a mere backdrop, how brightly would Lucy's virtues have shone. The tale of Lucy, an English visitor to Rome or Vienna, would have been well worth telling—the gentle dawning of love, its tragic shadows.

Become more feminine, Mr Eliot and (in confidence) dispense with "George". Adopt a female pseudonym, and the gentler sex will welcome you as one of their own.

Lydia Shaxberd

Metamorphosis
A man turning overnight into a swan, a monkey, or even a bat, would have afforded most comic novelists opportunities for some amusing scenes. But Mr Kafka, fresh from his hilarious tour-de-force, *The Trial*, has his new hero, Gregor, turn into an insect. This is a ludicrous idea. It necessitates several problems with scale and perspective, which would obviously preoccupy any sufferer to a tremendous extent. Mr Kafka's hapless mutant, however, seems only intermittently aware of events—utterly unbelievable in the circumstances. The metaphorical sub-text—plainly, that one should be nicer to animals—is not helped by the choice of an insect. Some readers, should they persist, may actually find the creature overly revolting. As it is, Mr Kafka obviously tires of his creation, spending a deal of time instead upon the relatives. These are good honest folk about whom our author is inconsistent: sometimes they are incongruously represented as lazy. I can't help feeling that, if Grete had been a dancer, and her father and mother respectively a sanitory inspector and beautician, more plot lines might have been developed. There is a happy ending, too, that sabotages what little satire is attempted.

Bill Greenwell

GRYPH'S QUIZ

The answers all have something in common

1. The Stick
2. Witnesses' organ
3. Irangate investigators
4. Submarine superstructure
5. Site of confusion
6. Site of seclusion
7. Inner London Borough
8. Parsee death mound
9. Designed for the Paris Exhibition
10. Tuscan campanile (not true!)

Answers below

No 3294 Set by George Cowley
"And God said: 'Let there be nothing'—and disappeared." Can we have Bible stories as retold by atheists. Max 200 words, and in by 9 September.

Quiz answers

All are towers: 1) Blackpool Tower; 2) Watch Tower; 3) Tower Commission; 4) Conning tower; 5) Tower of Babel; 6) Ivory tower; 7) Tower Hamlets; 8) Tower of Silence; 9) Eiffel Tower; 10) Leaning Tower of Pisa. Note: 1: Local nickname

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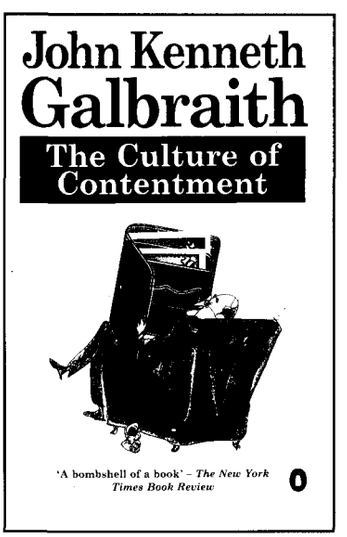

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CHESS

The 80th British Chess Championship carries on as Michael Hennigan and Parshan Kumaran have yet to contest their play-off match, which will now be held in early September at Chess and Bridge's premises in Euston Road, London.

These were their respective last-round victories.

White: K Arkell; Black: D Kumaran

1. d4 d5 2. Nf3 e6 3. c4 dxc4 4. e4 b5 5. a4 c6 6. b3 Bb4+ 7. Bd2 Bxd2+ 8. Qxd2 Nf6 9. e5 Ne4 10. Qe3 Qa5+ 11. Nfd2 Nxd2 12. Qxd2 Qxd2+ 13. Nxd2 . . . An inexplicable decision after which he is probably already lost. **13 . . . c3 14. Ne4 b4 15. a5 Ba6 16. Ra4 Bxf1 17. Rxf1 Na6 18. Ke2 Ke7 19. Nc5 Nxc5 20. dxc5 Rab8 21. Rd1 Rb5 22. Rd4 Rd8! 23. Rxd8 Kxd8 24. Kd1 a6 25. f4 Ke7 26. g4 f6 27. h4 fxe5 28. fxe5 Kf7 29. h5 g6 30. Kc2 gxh5 31. gxh5 Kg7 32. Ra1 Rxc5 33. Rd1.** White resigned.

White: M Hennigan; Black: M Hebden

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Nc3 Nf6 4. Bb5 Nd4 5. Ba4 c6 Salov's idea, I believe. **6. Nxe5 d5 7. d3 Bd6 8. f4 0-0 9. 0-0 Bc5 10. Kh1 b5 11. Bb3 a5 12. a3 Nxb3 13. cxb3 dxe4 14. dxe4 Qxd1 15. Rxd1 Be6 16. Re1 Rfc8 17. Be3 Bf8 18. Nd3 c5!? 19. e5 Ng4 20. Bg1 Bxb3 21. Ne4 c4 22. Ndc5 a4?!** Afterwards neither player liked this move.

22. h3 Nh6 23. g4 Rd8 24. Kg2 Rd5 25. Nxb3 axb3 27. Rad1 Rad8 28. Rxd5 Rxd5 29. Nc3 Rd2+ 30. Re2 Rc2 31. Kxc2 bxc2 32. Be3 b4 33. axb4 Bxb4 34. Nd5 Bc5 35. Bc1 Kf8 36. Kf3 Ke8 37. Ne3 f6 38. exf6 gxf6 39. Nxc4 Kd7 40. Ne3 Kc6 41. Nxc2 Kd5 42. b3 Nf7 43. Bb2 Ke6 44. f5+ Ke7 45. h4 Nd6 46. Ne3 Black resigned.

An important game from the last round.

White: C Ward Black: J Hodgson

1. d4 d6 2. e4 Nf6 3. f3 d5 4. Nc3 dxe4 5. Bg5!? exf3 6. Nxf3 e6

Normally one fianchettoes the King's Bishop after accepting the Blackmar-Diemer Gambit, but I bet Hodgson had never before played against it—and here White has an extra tempo too.

7. Bd3 Be7 8. 0-0 Nc6 9. Kh1 Ng4 10. Ne5 0-0 allowing a species of Greek gift. **11. Bxf6 Bxf6 12. Bxh7+ Kxh7 13.Qh5+ Kg8 14. Ne4 . . .** 14. Rf3 is repulsed by 14 . . . g6 **14 . . . g6** 14 . . . Nd5 is inadequate, for after 15. c4 g6 16. Nxg6 fxg6 17. Qxg6+ Bg7 18. cxd5 exd5 19. Ng5 Rf6 20. Qh7+ Kf8 21. Kg1 . . . White has a winning attack.

15. Nxg6 . . . Spectating, I thought that 15. Qg4 might be more troublesome, prompted by the observation that Black cannot withdraw his bishop, viz: 15 . . . Bg7 16. Rxf7! Rxf7 17. Nxf7 Kxf7 18. Rf1+ Kg8 19. Qxg6 and the attack triumphs. Since 15 . . . Bxe5 grants an automatic assault after 16. dxe5, we arrive by process of elimination at 15 . . . Nd5 as the only defence. Try as I would to do Black in after that, I could not, for example 16. c4 Bg7! 17. Ng5 . . . (Intending 18. Qh4) 17 . . . f6 18. Nxg6 Re8 and he hangs on.

15 . . . fxg6 16. Qxg6+ Bg7 17. Ng5 Rf6 Trying to win with 17. . . Rxf1+ 18. Rxf1 Qxg5 19. Qxg5 is not a good idea after 19 . . . Nc6 20. Qg6 intends Rf7.

Also 17 . . . Rf5 18. Rxf5 exf5 19. Qf7+ Kh8 is at least a draw, so Hodgson did not analyse the line any further.

18. Qh7+ Kf8 19. Qg6 . . . 19. Qh5 is the move to keep the game going. Black can play 19 . . . Kg8 with a draw but, given the tournament position, he intended 19 . . . Nd5 when 20. Rxf6+ Qxf6 21. Nh7+ Kg8 22. Nxf6+ Nxf6 23. Qg6 Bd7 leads to a situation where, objectively, White is better but Black can still play to win.

19 . . . Kg8 Not 19 . . . Nd5 because, after 20. Rxf6+ Qxf6 21. Nh7+ Kg8 22. Nxf6+ Nxf6 23. Rf1 Black is lost.

20. Qh7+ Kf8 21. Qg6 Kg8 22. Qh7+ Kf8 23. Qg6 Kg8 24. Qh7+ Kf8 25. Qg6 Drawn.

The explanation for the excessive repetitions is that both players were watching the games on the adjacent boards. Had Arkell-Kumaran looked like ending in a draw then Hodgson would have risked playing on.

James Plaskett

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Gardening is the most imporant thing there is, says **Mat Coward**

I was out drinking last Friday night, when I suddenly realised that I hadn't set the video to record *Gardeners' World*. And do you know what I did? I just stuck another 20p in the quiz machine, and thought "Sod it". That's how bad things have become under the New World Order.

You hardly ever see a vegetable on *Gardeners' World* these days. In fact, you hardly ever see a gardener on *Gardeners' World*—even the great Geoff Hamilton appears as little more than a mucky master of ceremonies. Instead, it's all Gertrude Jekyll, and colour schemes, and, in one notoriously ill-judged mini-series, a man who admitted to being a garden designer, and had the mannerisms to prove it.

Which is sad, really, because Hamilton is a sound sort, practical, lively-minded and unpretentious, and having him as the figurehead of the privatised version of *Gardeners' World* is like asking Dennis Skinner to front the Citizens Charter. There again, it's sad, but it's not tragic because *Gardeners' World* is, after all, only television. *Gardeners' Question Time*, on the other hand, is radio, and therefore of rather more importance.

Clay Jones is the only person in this country who I would vote for for president. I don't think we need a president any more than we need a monarch, but at least under Clay the nation would be in the safe hands of a man of wisdom and understanding.

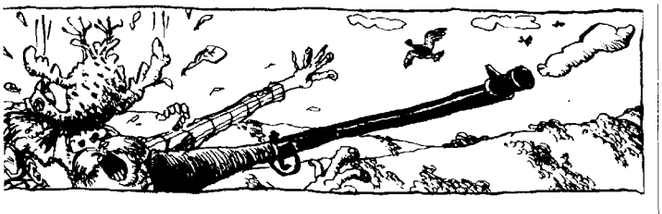
His departure from *GQT* undoubtedly signals a fresh wave of attacks on all that is good by the Change Machine. It is a particular feature of a time such as ours, when a civilisation is snowballing towards its demise, that all change is for the bad.

In earlier periods, when a system is still relatively healthy, change may be either constructive or destructive—but once the rot has infected the social body beyond any possibility of cure, all reforms serve inevitably to quicken decay.

GQT is a good example of this, being a simple and perfect institution, requiring no attention beyond routine maintenance. It serves its satisfied audience in exactly the way they wish to be served; it is beautifully presented, sublimely produced and edited. It exists as an ideal template not only for other gardening programmes, but for all programmes; no other show on radio or TV is as witty, elegant, purposeful, and professional. No other living broadcaster is master of his art to the extent that Clay Jones is. His only close rivals are Daphne and Stefan and Fred and the others, whose relaxed intelligence is the product of experience and knowledge, not of style and education.

So, naturally, the addicts of change have to do away with it ("improve it" is the euphemism, but the long-term effect will certainly be abolition). Perhaps because its perfection reflects embarrassingly on the rubbish that surrounds it. Or perhaps, as I increasingly suspect, change-vandalism is a goal in itself, pursued by people whose role in the end of the world has been determined for them by a process of parallel evolution: our fates are now controlled by a new sub-species of human, the A&R men of the apocalypse.

It goes without saying, I hope, even in such degenerate company as this, that gardening is the most important thing there is—and that those who would glitz it into youthy irrelevance are the same people engaged in terminally reforming our hospitals and railways, through a calculated erosion of meaning and reality. In the 1980s, they were content merely to destroy civil society; today, their aim is nothing less than the complete bollocksisation of Britain.



Cobwebs are the latest secret weapons in the Balkans, reports **Paul Sieveking**

Spider webs have been researched for possible military purposes at least since the second world, when the Germans tested the dissemination of anthrax with silk thread webs. In the 1960s, the US army explored the use of such webs as a less expensive alternative to the aerosol testing of biological agents, but in 1968 declared its inability to re-create the natural silk polymer produced by spiders. After the genetic engineering advances of the past ten years, such synthesis should now be possible. However, the US army today is tight-lipped about web warfare. A spokesman at Edgewood Arsenal in Maryland said the subject was classified and he was unable to answer even simple background questions.

Radio Croatia first reported the release of "a mysterious weblike substance" over its territory on 8 November 1991, and by the following November there had been more than 200 reports of cobweb bombardment in Croatia alone. Croat scientists presented inconclusive evidence that "the material had produced chromosomal aberrations", according to Benjamin C Garrett, writing in an August 1992 issue of the *ASA (Applied Science Analysis) Newsletter*.

Garrett, an analytical chemist and executive director of the Chemical & Biological Arms Control Institute in Alexandria, Virginia, visited Croatia in June 1992 with other scientists to examine "cobweb" samples. There were two distinct types of very fine fibres, one being one-tenth of a micron in thickness and of a protein nature that could be natural or man-made; the other was four-tenths of a micron thick, and "most likely" made of polyurethane. Both were thinner than anything manufactured by routine processes. There was no sign of viruses, bacteria, fungi, or chemical warfare agents.

Garrett pointed out that spiders were migrating naturally when the cobwebs were first noticed, but there was no evidence that spiders were with the material when it was dropped. In any case, he said, "no spider has yet been found to synthesise polyurethane". However, Radio Croatia also claimed that "large quantities" of live yellow-backed spiders had emerged from canisters dropped on the eastern Croatian town of Daruvar by the Yugoslav airforce in late 1991. An unnamed doctor appeared on TV to say that he had found no trace of poison among the spider samples he had seen, but that the next generation "could be the killer strain".

Video footage of cobweb bombardments exists. Some show a fibrous mass ejected from aircraft, changing from spherical to sausage-shaped before breaking up and hitting the ground. Some of the threads were as long as 164 feet. According to the Tanjug news agency in Belgrade, the Yugoslav airforce admitted dropping the substance, and claimed it was to counter anti-aircraft defence; but Garrett pointed out that the threads were non-conductive and so their supposed purpose made no sense; all the experts remained puzzled. One suggestion was that the webs could be used to deliver biological agents that could degrade insulation in electrical wiring or cause a rapid breakdown of lubricants.

Like any war, the conflict in the Balkans has been a hotbed for exotic rumours. Reports from Serbia, in particular, smack of magical realism. In 1991, there was a claim that Croats in the town of Osijek had freed tigers from the local zoo to roam the countryside lunching on Chetnik guerrillas. State-run television often features a chap who assures viewers that at the moment when final destruction threatens the Serbian nation, a fleet of vampires will arise from the cemeteries to overwhelm its enemies. He advises Serbs to stockpile garlic.

One evening in May 1993, the Belgrade TV news carried a graphic report that Croatian forces in Bosnia had attacked a Serbian village and tortured every man, woman and child to death. The report was substantially true; but the reporter had omitted one detail. The massacre took place over 50 years ago, during the second world war. •

Paul Sieveking is editor of "Fortean Times"

Felix Bennett

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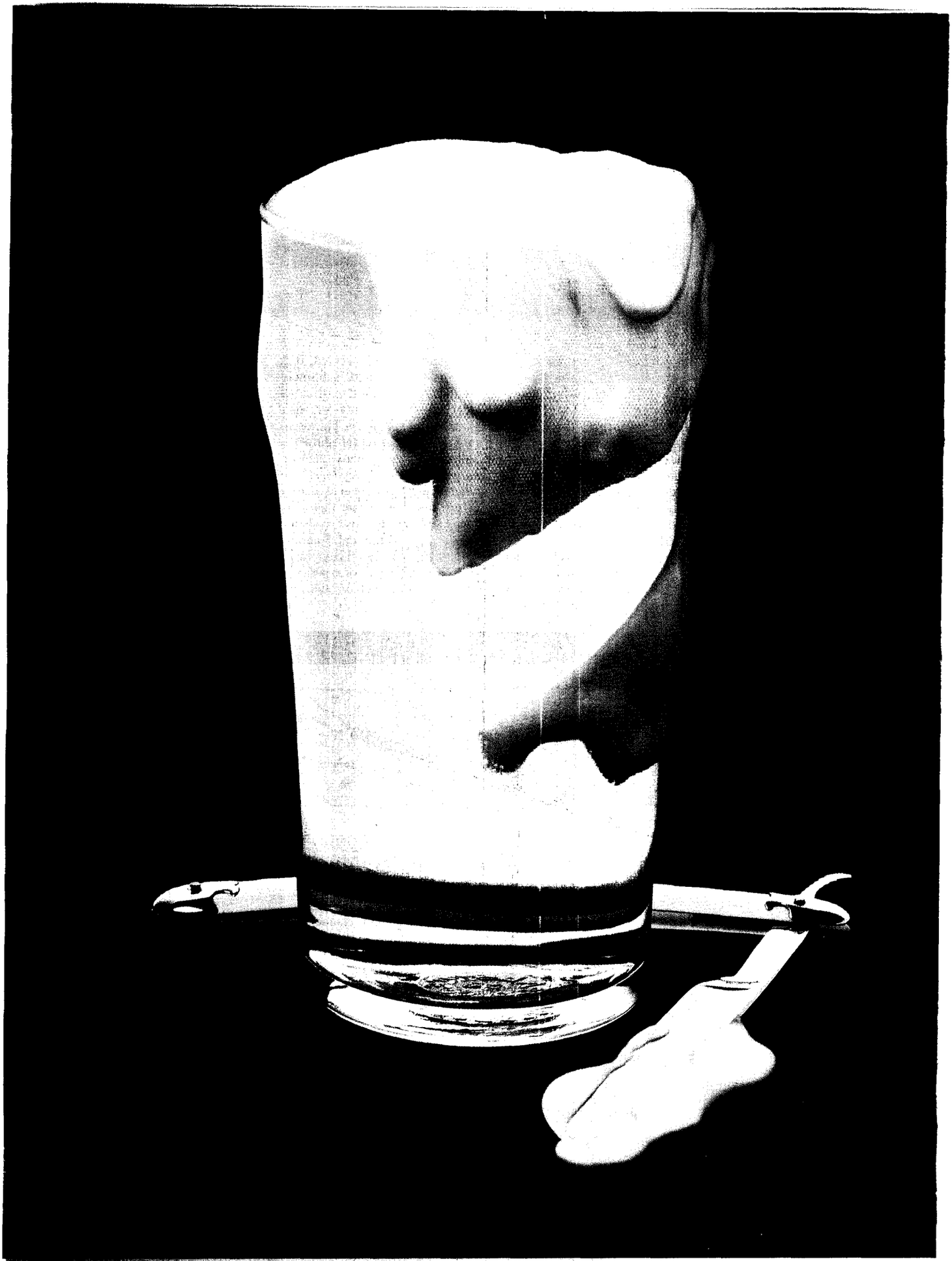

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